



THE QUITTER

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**THE
QUITTER**

**BY
JACOB
FISHER**



"I WILL TRY TO BE MORE THAN GOLD TO YOU, MY HUSBAND"

THE QUITTER

A NOVEL

BY
JACOB FISHER

Author of "The Cradle of the Deep," "The Man Who Saw Wrong," etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY
H. WESTON TAYLOR

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CHAPTER I

THE CHALLENGE

HALLAM brushed the clinging snow from his knickerbockers as they reached the top of the toboggan slide.

"Will you go down again, Sophia, or shall we go back and have tea?"

His tone was so politely bored that Miss Burton looked at him and laughed.

"You are so very enthusiastic, Ransford, that I am almost tempted to make you slide until you drop. I should like to see you really physically tired for once."

Hallam kicked off his heavy leather toe-guard, and together they climbed to the broad terrace, beneath which the snow-covered roofs of the city glistened in the sun of a March afternoon.

"Well?" he inquired, straightening his big shoulders and uncovering to the breeze a head of rough, damp, tawny hair, "why shouldn't I be bored? I'll be honest and

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confess it, but you are just as bored as I. You hate tobogganing. You only do it because you couldn't come to Quebec and not do what is considered the smart thing."

"How well you know me, Ranse. To hear you one would almost think we were——"

"Sophia!" exclaimed Hallam sharply, "Don't joke. How many times have I asked you to marry me? I ask you again. I——"

"That makes the fourth time in two days," smiled Miss Burton. "The novelty is wearing off. I quite liked it—yesterday."

"That's just it," Hallam complained, "you don't even respect me. You've gotten too used to it. Why won't you marry me? Can't you see I'm sick, just for the want of you? That's it! I am sick. That's the way it affects people sometimes. It must be the trouble with me—why I'm bored to death with everything."

"And in time you would include me," said Miss Burton. "No, Ransford, I won't joke for a moment. I'll give it to you straight. I like you. I like you better than any other man I know, but you've just hit it. I don't respect you. If I needed you on account of

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your money I might marry you, just as you are, but I do not need you for your money. I have plenty of money of my own, and to be honest, Ranse, I don't need you for anything. If you were a different sort of man, one who possessed the qualities I am without, a man with ideals and ambitions and the will to carry them to success, you would have no trouble, I am sure, in convincing me that I need you. If you were the sort of man I mean, I could not help myself. I should have to marry you because it would be your will."

Hallam stopped short, staring at her in amazement.

Miss Burton looked at him quietly under the veil of her dark lashes.

"You don't quite know what to make of it, do you, Ransford?"

"No," said Hallam, briefly, "I don't."

"Then perhaps I'd better explain," went on Miss Burton, calmly. "You see, Ranse, you and I are altogether too much alike. We move from place to place, or are moved, without much thought of why we do it, and we carry on the little, petty businesses of life in much the same way that scores of other people we know carry them on. Our days

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and nights are planned for us in the general scheme of the set in which we exist. We have no particular individuality of our own, nor does it seem very desirable that we should have. I have no more ambition than you. If I should marry you, we would become like so many of our friends, contented for a short time, then restless, then unhappy, then—well, I won't finish the picture, Ranse,—you can draw it as well as I.'

"Do you mean to say that I would tire of you?"

"No, my dear Ransford," she smiled, "I left it to you to say. You have finished the picture."

"And what particular line of ideals and ambitions would you choose for me?" he asked, a bitter note coming into his voice. "Shall it be finance, science, or, perhaps, philanthropy?"

At the hint of mockery she suddenly wheeled on him, her eyes brilliant, her cheeks flushed.

"Oh, you don't understand," she cried, "you can't understand. I want a *man*, Ransford Hallam, a *man*—one who has done something to prove it! One who, no matter where or how he finds himself, has the courage and

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the will to take the world by the throat, and shake it until he gets what he wants from it. I want a man who compels, who masters men, conditions, me—everything! It doesn't make any difference *what* a man does, it is *how* he does it—whether he gets what he goes after. What have you ever gone after? What have you ever done to prove yourself? You went to college and tutored your way through because you were lazy and had money. You played a little football on your class team. You rowed on your class crew. Why didn't you make the 'varsity? Why didn't you stand at the top of something? You didn't because it was easier to drift—easier to let the other fellow do the work, while you looked on with a foolish cynicism on your tongue for his success. And after college what did you do? You pottered with business—just enough to learn how to clip your coupons and collect your rents. You tried polo and yachting, and you even flew twice around an aërodrome. But you didn't go far enough with any of these things to make a mark, even in sport. You quit, Ransford, There's no other word for it. You quit."

Hallam, moving slowly by her side, said

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nothing, but if she had looked at him she would have noticed that his chin was jutting a little farther forward than was its wont, and that his eyes were burning under the brows that had beetled down over them. And if she had laid a friendly hand on his shoulder, underneath the white blanket-coat he wore she would have felt the tense muscles, stiff as steel.

But she did not look at him, nor did she lay a hand on his shoulder. Instead she kept her eyes straight ahead, and as they walked slowly toward the hotel she continued to speak, seemingly as much to herself as to him:

“Perhaps I am not very clear. Have you ever been in a situation where your money could not help you, and your friends and your influence could not help you—where it became necessary for you to rely solely upon yourself, your own strength of body, and mind, and character to pull you through? I have often wondered what you would do in such a case—whether you would be equal to the lone fight, or whether you would allow circumstances and the men behind them to put you under.”

Miss Burton paused and stole a little glance at the man by her side, and she caught at

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last the stiffening of the jaw-muscles and the frowning of the brows. As they walked on she had an unpleasant feeling that perhaps she had said too much. She cast about for something to lighten the too-evident tension, and looking up she found it.

"See!" she cried, turning to Hallam suddenly, "there's that woman again—the one who wears the beautiful coat. Look at her! She's coming across the terrace!"

The woman was tall and of splendid figure. She wore a coat of fur, which the day before had aroused Miss Burton's admiration and her envy. It was a short fur of a peculiar silvery-brown color, incredibly fine and soft, and the nap seemed to lie passively, whichever way it was stroked, so that the entire coat was a blending of light and shade, beautifully rich in its self-toned coloring.

"Isn't it the most exquisite thing you ever saw?" she exclaimed as the woman passed. "I would give almost anything just to stroke it once, and *anything* to have one like it. I never saw such fur. I must find out what it is."

"I have found out," Hallam said, shortly.

"When? How? What is it?"

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"It is the fur of the baby musk-ox—the unborn calf. I inquired of a furrier in the town this morning."

"Then I can get it here? Oh, Ransford!" she cried, "I could almost love you for that."

"No," he went on, "you cannot get it here. You can't get it anywhere. It is not for sale. Sometimes—not every year, a very few skins filter through from the North. The killing of the musk-oxen for their young is forbidden, and the authorities see to it that, if the skins are obtained, as they sometimes are by the Indian hunters, they do not find their way into the market. The furrier told me that this woman we saw just now is a rather notorious person, and that the trading-post factor who sent her the skins lost his place on account of it."

"Where, pray, do they keep these musk-oxen, that they cannot be hunted and killed?"

"The musk-oxen," explained Hallam, "live in the country beyond the timber line, just under the Arctic Circle and inside it, as far as the coast of the Arctic Ocean. There is a tremendous waste of barren ground up there, where nothing grows but short grasses and moss, on which the animals feed, but they have

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been hunted so hard that, like the buffalo, there are only a few of them left, and the Indians have to go farther and farther each year for their quarry. The skins that do come out are disposed of, generally, in secret through the favor of the factors, who have confiscated them from the hunters. They are the priceless furs of the world."

As they reached the hotel Miss Burton started to lead the way toward the tea-room, but when she saw that Hallam was not following she stopped and turned inquiringly. He was standing very still, looking at her. She noticed there was something different about him—something that caused her almost to pause and collect herself. It was as if the man had suddenly grown in stature. He stood there without moving, and slowly, as if something were drawing her, she moved toward him.

For a moment he looked at her without speaking.

"What is it, Ransford?" she asked, her voice low and a little uncertain. "Can't you forgive me for the things I said?"

"There's nothing to forgive," he said slowly. "They were all true."

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"But you're angry, or—or something, aren't you, or you wouldn't stand there looking so grim, and not coming to tea."

"I'm going to say good-bye," said Hallam, quietly.

"Good-bye?" she questioned, puzzled.

"Yes. You want a baby musk-ox coat. I'm going to get it for you."

CHAPTER II

THE MAN ON THE BED

THREE days later Ransford Hallam stepped off the train at the end of the track. The town marked the spot where civilization had made her latest pin-prick in the immense Canadian wilderness. From this place led the trail. Beyond the ultimate point to which the south wind could faintly carry the toot of a locomotive whistle were the silences of the hyperborean wastes. And there lay Hallam's road.

It was a land of snow, bright sunlight and blue sky that greeted him as he crossed the little platform. He asked the conductor who could put him up, and the man pointed to a building a hundred yards across the square which looked as if it might have been nailed together in a day.

As he started for it a sled drawn by a team of dogs rounded the corner of the station building. The driver was a half-breed by the look of him. As the team came to a stop

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the two leading dogs fought violently and the half-breed's whip curled in between them with savage strokes.

"Got any baggage? This man'll take it over for you," said the conductor. "Hey, Joe, here's a passenger."

The half-breed grinned. Hallam passed him his checks and waited to see his trunk and two heavy boxes safely loaded. The whip cracked, the dog-team straightened out, and with Joe running at one side shot off across the snow.

As Hallam followed he wondered at the stillness of the place. From the low, rough shacks grouped about the square the smoke of fires rose lazily, but of human life there was nothing to be seen. It was like a deserted village. Even the dog-team had disappeared around the back of the structure that passed for a hotel.

Hallam stamped the snow from his overshoes and pulled open the door. After the blinding glare of the sun the interior was hard to discern. He blinked for a moment and then dimly made out three or four men sitting about a stove in the center of the room. The air was thick and rank with the smoke of plug tobacco.

The Man on the Bed

The low-toned conversation that had been going on as he entered, suddenly ceased. Hallam took a step forward, throwing back the lapels of his great, fur-lined coat.

"Is the landlord about?" he asked.

No one answered. After a moment there was a sound of a scraping moccasin on the rough floor. As a welcome it was discouraging. Hallam tried again.

"Where is the proprietor?" he demanded, a trifle sharply.

One of the men seemed to repress a snicker. Then a reedy voice came from behind the stove.

"He's in that room, there, I guess."

"Can I see him?" inquired Hallam, turning to the door indicated.

"Sure yu can see him if yu go in," said the reedy voice.

Hallam did not like the way the words were spoken, but stepping to the door he opened it.

At first he saw no one. There was a bed in one corner, a wash-stand and two chairs. There was some one on the bed.

"Asleep," thought Hallam. "I'll have to wake him."

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He crossed the room and stopped short. The man on the bed was a dead man. On the forehead, between the eyes, was a blue mark where a bullet had entered.

Startled, shocked at finding himself suddenly face to face with violent death, Hallam stood gazing down on the sharply cut features of the corpse. As his thoughts slowly collected themselves it occurred to him that he had been victimized by those men in the other room. Why they should have played such a trick upon him, an utter and unoffending stranger, he could not understand. He stood very still by the bed, thinking. Then there crept into his mind the suspicion that this was a test, a challenge. These men wished to know what manner of man it was who had walked in among them. The idea came to Hallam that he must meet it in kind—that here and now he must show the stuff of which he was made, or forever forfeit his right to the respect of the Northland.

With an impulse that he hardly recognized as coming from within himself, he turned abruptly and walked back into the outer room. Without glancing at the group about the stove he slipped out of his fur-lined coat

The Man on the Bed

and dropped it on a chair. With still the feeling that it was not he, himself, but another who was directing his actions, he faced the silent men.

"Which one of you," he asked, in a quiet, deliberate voice, "is the ill-mannered pup that directed me in there?"

As he spoke he advanced slowly toward the center of the room.

There was silence about the stove. Not a man moved.

"You, there!" called Hallam, suddenly pointing his finger at the man farthest back in the shadow. "I think you were the one. Suppose you step out and let me look at you."

The man pointed at, shuffled his feet uneasily and rubbed the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Will you come out by yourself or shall I help you?"

One of the men dropped the fore-legs of his chair sharply to the floor.

"You're called, Whitey," he said with a short laugh. "He's onto yu. Go to it. We're needin' somethin' to cheer us up."

"Hold on there, Mister," spoke up the

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man with the reedy voice, hastily shoving back his chair before the approaching Hallam. "There's no call for yu to git mad. I didn't mean nuthin'. I see I made a mistake. I was takin' yu for one o' them drummers that's due to come a-pesterin' around here about this time."

"If it was a joke," returned Hallam, turning to the others, "my sense of humor doesn't take it in. Who is the dead man?"

"That's the landlord," said the man who had first spoken, "or it *was* the landlord, till a Yaller Knife Injin got him last night across his own bar."

The speaker rose.

"Ef yu want to git put up, I reckon I can fix it for yu with the widder. I'll jest speak to her."

He went to a rear door and called, while the others, including Whitey, slowly divorced themselves from their chairs and filed out.

The first man returned.

"The widder says she can take care o' yu all right," he said. "Yu can have that room there," pointing to the one in which the dead man lay. "We're goin' to bury him this afternoon."

The Man on the Bed

"And what," asked Hallam, "became of the murderer?"

"Oh, there warn't no trouble about him. Yu see, they drawed together. We buried Mister Injin this mornin'."

Hallam glanced about the room. Its utter rawness and lack of comfort, the bare board floor, the walls and ceiling, black and greasy from wood-smoke, the few wooden chairs in disorder about the stove, the unwashed glass of the windows, the odor of stale tobacco mixed with that of damp and dirty clothing, hung to dry against the wall, and the smell of backwoods cookery from the kitchen—all combined to give him a feeling that he was out of place, a rank outsider, a misfit. A sense of loneliness and friendlessness suddenly rose up and possessed him. He saw in his impulsive starting upon this adventure the ill-advisement of youth. He half acknowledged to himself a wish that he had not come.

Through the open door came the sound of a locomotive, chugging its way to its shed down the track, and it occurred to him that he was not yet altogether lost. The way out still remained open. If he chose, he could take it. But as the thought came, shame came with

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it, shame for his faint heart, for his lack of courage, for the smallness of his manhood. He noticed the man at his side looking at him curiously, and he imagined the contempt that would come into his eyes could he read the thoughts that were passing in his mind. His memory leaped back to Sophia Burton, her half-amused, half-incredulous smile as he had said good-bye. There could be no turning back for Ransford Hallam.

CHAPTER III

THE START

“**F**RIEND,” said the man at Hallam’s side,” it ain’t polite in these parts to be askin’ a stranger’s business, an’ I ain’t goin’ to over-step the line none, but my name’s Jackson, Thomas Jackson. I’m pretty well known, and if I can do any-thing——”

“My name’s Hallam, Mr. Jackson—Ransford Hallam, of New York. You’re right about my being a stranger—and a tenderfoot, too.”

Jackson smiled.

“I’d be glad of a little advice and a little help. I’m ready to pay well for it.”

Before the words were out, instinctively Hallam felt that he had struck the wrong note.

Jackson looked at him steadily for a moment, his gray eyes narrowing.

“I beg your pardon,” said Hallam.

“All right, stranger,” returned Jackson, “I just wasn’t thinkin’ of it that way.”

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"You're very kind, Mr. Jackson. I begin to suspect that New York ways and Athabasca ways are as far apart as the two places on the map."

Involuntarily Hallam glanced through the open door of the inner room where the dead man lay in full view, the cold, sharp profile showing white against the dark background of the wall. Jackson followed the glance, and, stepping to the door, closed it.

"McAvey, there, won't be interested in our conversation," he said.

"McAvey?" Hallam questioned.

"Angus McAvey."

Hallam had a distinct feeling of having heard the name recently.

"McAvey," he repeated. "Angus McAvey."

"He was one of the fur company's factors till last summer," volunteered Jackson. "He had a small post, way to the north beyond the big lake."

A light broke on Hallam. Angus McAvey was the name of the factor who had lost his post for selling musk-ox furs, against the company's rules. It was on the end of his tongue to speak of it, but something warned

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him that the subject of musk-ox fur was a dangerous one to broach.

"How did he get shot?" he asked instead.

"Why, we don't none of us know exactly," said Jackson, pulling up a chair. "We was out here in this room, half a dozen of us, when along about dusk an Injin drove up to the door with a sledge and a team o' dogs. He come in an' looked around, an' asked for McAvey. Somebody pointed to the bar, an' he went in. We warn't payin' no attention, when there come two shots, clost together. We run in, an' there they was, one on one side o' the bar and one on th' other, both drilled clean through the head. It's the first killin' we had this year."

"Where did the Indian come from?" asked Hallam, interested.

"He was a Yaller Knife—half-breed, I should say, from somewhere up North. No one ever seen him here before."

"Why did he kill McAvey?"

Jackson shrugged.

"Dunno. Maybe the old man wouldn't sell him a drink. It's agin' the law to sell Injins. Then agin', maybe he had an old grudge, but the old woman, McAvey's wife

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or widder, that is, won't let on she ever seen him before. So we buried him, an' here comes the boys to bury McAvey."

Looking out Hallam saw four men bearing a rough board coffin across the square. Jackson rose and opened the door, and the box was brought in and placed on two chairs. Other men arrived until the small room was nearly filled. The body was brought out and laid in its last hard bed, clothed as it had been when the man was killed.

There was a movement in the back of the room and the men made way for some one to pass. Hallam, curiously watching from a corner, saw that it was McAvey's widow, a huge woman of slightly more than middle age, with a hard, expressionless face. She walked to the side of the coffin and stood looking down at her husband, as emotionless as a statue. Then she sat down in a chair that Jackson brought.

"Ready, Mr. Sanders," said Jackson, and Hallam saw a young man in the cloth of the Church step to the head of the coffin. It was dark in the room and some one held a lamp while he read the service. As he finished, the men who had brought the box placed the

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cover upon it, and raising it on their shoulders carried it out to a sled drawn by a pair of horses that stood waiting. The widow followed, and the little procession moved out of sight.

Hallam stayed where he was. The room lately occupied by the dead man was now his, but he did not go into it. The thought of sleeping there, on the bed that had held the corpse, made him shiver a little. The entire atmosphere of the place was depressing and he felt a wild desire to see the last of it. He decided to push his arrangements and to leave for the North at the earliest possible moment.

In less than half an hour Jackson and the others of the funeral party returned and filed solemnly into the bar. Jackson beckoned to Hallam.

"The widder," he announced, "asks me to thank everybody for their services on this here sad occasion, and invites those present to take a drink."

He stepped behind the bar and set out glasses and a bottle.

"Well, here's hopin' McAvey's in a better place than what he left," said Jackson.

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The toast was drunk in neat whiskey and the men filed out. Hallam seized his opportunity. Without informing Jackson in much detail of his plans, or giving him a hint of the object of his journey, he told him that he wished to make his way to Great Slave Lake, and to continue on to the northward while the country was still frozen.

Jackson asked no questions and readily undertook to procure two dog teams and drivers.

"Joe, the half-breed that brought yure boxes from the station is a first class driver and his team is a good one," said Jackson. "The only other good team here now is the one left by the Injin that killed McAvey. I'm takin' charge o' that, an' I'll let yu have it if we can get a driver."

Jackson kept a general supply store, where Hallam found he could get the provisions he needed, and so it came about that most of the arrangements were left to his new friend. By night the lists were made out and the packing was well under way.

As Hallam returned to the hotel he found himself in much lighter spirits. Things were going better than he had hoped, and with

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luck in securing a second driver there would be nothing to prevent his making a start at once.

But the thought of the dead man's bed acted as a damper upon his enthusiasm. With a lamp he inspected the room. It seemed fairly clean, but a splotch of blood on the pillow where the head of McAvey had rested sent a qualm through him. He thought of asking the widow for another room, but from the talk of the men who came filing in he learned that the house was full, and that two of them were even doubling up to give him a place by himself.

For an hour he sat in the one straight-backed chair and read for a second time the magazine he had bought on the train. But the oil in the lamp was low. The wick began to sputter and he saw that in a few minutes he would be left in darkness. Fighting back the squeamishness that seemed bound to possess him, he turned the pillow to hide the blood spot, and wrapping himself in his fur-lined coat, lay down in the murdered man's place to wait for the morning. For hours, it seemed to him, he lay there, broad awake, his mind intensely active, leaping from one

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thought to another, until at last he fell into a restless, broken sleep, which toward morning, however, became profound.

But the new day banished the discomforts of the night. Jackson came to tell him that he had found a Dog-Rib Indian named Wolf Bone who was willing to drive the dead Yellow Knife's dogs. With Jackson's aid Hallam settled the advance to be paid and deposited with the storekeeper the balance, to be turned over only on a proper voucher.

"Don't never pay an Injin what he asks," advised Jackson. "If yu do, yu'll likely wake up some mornin' and find yu're shell-roaded, with Injins, dogs, camp-kit and all among the missin'."

Half the population turned out to see them off and escorted the two sledges to the edge of the clearing. Joe, the half-breed, and Wolf Bone, the Dog Rib, ran beside their teams, while Hallam rode on the second sledge. The air was crisp, the sun bright, the sky blue and the dogs in the best of condition. It seemed a propitious beginning. But as they left the clearing and the last house dropped out of sight, and the last man waved his hand in farewell, Hallam realized for the

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first time that there, ahead on the long white trail, lay the unknown.

Up to the present the business of preparation had occupied him so fully that he had had little time to turn his thoughts to the actualities of the journey. To Jackson and the other men it was commonplace—one of the incidents that went to make up their rough lives. Any one of them would have undertaken it without a second thought. But to Hallam, now that he was at last headed out, the problem of carrying his venture to success bulked large.

City-bred, used to the most luxurious living that civilization could devise, with almost unlimited money to smooth the path, he had chosen to loose himself from the world he knew, from the friends whose aid and support he could command, from the influence that his wealth could bring, and to make his way, alone, to near the top of the continent—and for what? To bring back a rare and priceless fur with which to drape the form of a girl who had called him a quitter!

CHAPTER IV

INTO THE NORTH

TEN minutes after leaving the town Hallam was in the wilderness. Had it not been for the blazes on the scattering cottonwood trunks that marked the windings of the trail he might have believed himself in a land that the foot of man had never trod.

It was a late, cold spring. The March sun scarcely warmed the air above the freezing point and the snow was in prime condition for travel. The loads were not extreme and the pace was good.

They had not been on the trail above half an hour when a low exclamation from Wolf Bone in the lead brought them to a halt. Joe and Hallam ran forward to find the Dog Rib staring at the remains of a recent camp-fire.

The two drivers examined the spot, speaking together in low tones, but it was Hallam who found the clue to the late camper.

Into the North

In kicking over the dead embers he saw a bit of rawhide and picked it up. He called Wolf Bone, who drove the dead Indian's dogs, and to his surprise the man at once fitted the scrap to the torn end of a trace in his team's harness.

It was the slayer of McAvey who had rested here, within two miles of the settlement. Why?

As they left the spot Hallam pondered. A man who has driven many miles to reach civilization, whether he be red or white, does not sit down within hailing distance of the goal and wait—without a purpose. He began to see something in the killing of McAvey besides a sudden quarrel over a drink of whiskey.

At night Hallam had his first experience of a sleeping-bag, with the frozen snow for a mattress. He slept warm, and wondered at the comfort of it, for his thermometer at daylight showed a drop to fifteen degrees below zero.

They went on, sleeping the next night at a little settlement on the bank of the river they were thence to follow. This was the last connection with the world outside. To the

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north there was nothing of white men's work but the far-scattered trading-posts of the great fur companies, and now and then a mission.

Now that they were following the river the traveling became easier. For mile after mile the dogs pulled unweariedly. Hallam by degrees ceased to ride, and at the end of a few days was able to keep the pace, running by the sledges. Sometimes, at night, they stopped early to cut a water-hole through three feet of blue ice, for wood began to grow scarce, and often Hallam's primus stove, burning alcohol, was called into service. At length they came to a long stretch of frozen rapids, where the ice was treacherous. Once, the leading team broke through and there were moments of wildest anxiety until the dogs were hauled, dripping, to the firm ice. On certain days they hunted, and Hallam shot his first caribou. That night they had fried liver and the dogs bolted a feast of fresh meat.

Hallam gloried in it all. After the first acute tortures of muscle lameness had disappeared he began to feel himself growing strong. It became a delight to run beside the dogs, to help push the sledges over the

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rough places, to turn in at night by the light of the cold stars to dream of the girl to whom he was to prove himself.

At two fur-trading posts, called by courtesy "forts," they were welcome guests, and rested one day at each, Hallam giving the news of the outside world in exchange for bed and board.

At these places he was careful not to disclose the real object of his journey, but let it be understood that he was a mining man on his way to the north in search of copper. He did not fear that the Indians would tell, for the balance due them on their return, together with a liberal bonus promised in event of success would effectually close their mouths.

The days were growing longer and the sun warmer, for April was in sight, and the soft condition of the snow in the middle of the day warned Hallam that he had no time to lose. Thanks to their rifles and the caribou, which were now on their spring migration to the north, there had been no lack of fresh meat for both dogs and men, and the inroads on the regular stock of provisions had been smaller than Hallam had expected. To save delay

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he determined not to stop at the trading-post on the great lake, but to continue on to the east and cross the lake there, where the width was not more than twenty miles.

When he announced this plan to Joe and Wolf Bone both the men strongly demurred. The sledges were getting weak, they said. They needed repairing and the dogs needed a rest to prevent spring-sickness.

It was the last day on the river. By night they would reach the point where the trail left the stream and cut across country to the fort. The men showed signs of discontent and held frequent consultations. Hal-lam had examined the sledges and could find no serious trouble—nothing that could not be repaired perfectly well en route. The dogs, too, seemed in the pink of condition, and he decided that the men's excuses were trumped up to earn for themselves a few days' lay-off.

Nothing was said that night, and the tent was pitched as usual. They were awake at daylight. The tent was struck, the sledges packed and the dogs linked in the traces. Joe, in the lead, pointed down the blazed road to the fort.

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"We go this way," he said.

Wolf Bone nodded a vigorous assent.

But Hallam was beginning to understand Indian nature. He stood in his tracks and pointed to the white sheet of frozen river.

"That is our road," he said.

The Indians immediately took out their pipes, and seating themselves on their snow-shoes prepared to argue the matter.

"Joe, Wolf Bone," said Hallam, "it is necessary that I go on to the north while the snow is yet good. You are pledged to go with me. You have been paid for half the journey. If you insist on going to the fort we will go, but if we do I shall consider that you have fulfilled only half your contract and that your services to me are at an end. You have been paid half. You will get no more."

The Indians showed surprise and disappointment and held a rapid conversation in their own tongue. Hallam sat a little apart, quietly smoking, seemingly indifferent to their decision.

At last Joe came over to him and rather shamefacedly announced that they were ready to go on, and that there would be no more grumbling.

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“Good,” said Hallam. “Mush on, then.”

The dogs broke into their steady, long-distance lope and the remaining miles slipped under the sledge runners swiftly. At noon the lake itself was in sight.

They halted on the shore of the great, white, wind-swept waste—three hundred miles from end to end, fifty across in the western reaches. The northern shore, twenty miles away, looked like a pencil-mark on the horizon. While the men were gathering wood to boil the kettle, Hallam sat looking out over the vast expanse. Hitherto the journey had been one of no great difficulty. Any man might have made it—almost without discomfort. Here was the dividing line. Across that plain of snow and ice lay the great Barren Ground of the North, stretching away beyond the Arctic Circle. No man lived there. Here, at the lake, as it were, the world of human things was left behind. The trading-post to the west was the last frail link between Hallam and his world—between him and the woman he loved; the woman to whom he was about to attempt to show that he was a man. Here, indeed, was he to depend upon his own courage and

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his own resources, not only in the winning of the prize he had come already so far to seek, but for the preservation of his very life. Henceforward it was his manhood alone that was to count.

As Hallam had brought no canoe on his sledges it was necessary that he should cross the lake on his return journey before the ice left it. It was his intention then to procure a canoe from the factor at the post, and make his way back to civilization in the quickest possible time. So far, according to the Indians and the people at the two forts at which they had stopped, it had been an exceptionally late season, so that there was little cause for doubt that mid-May would not find the lake still closed.

For his choice of hunting-ground Hallam had trusted to the best advice of Jackson, in whom he had finally confided, and who had made several journeys to the barrens in various seasons of the year. The Indians, too, had backed this advice with experiences of their own, and while it was agreed that year by year the musk-oxen were retreating farther and farther back toward the north, he felt reasonably sure of success in the region he had chosen.

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The crossing of the lake was made in quick time, and as they neared the northern shore Hallam saw that, in contrast to the low country they had left, the lake was bordered by a high, rocky ridge, crowned in many places with sizable clumps of stunted spruce. A succession of rocky islands stretched to the northeast through the long axis of the lake, and the course lay behind these, where the party would be sheltered from the sweep of the wind.

Monotonously they traveled on the ice for three days. But the snow was hard, the pace rapid, and the head of the lake was reached sooner than was expected. As they left it and turned full north again, the sparse timber was left behind and Hallam at last found himself in the promised land—the great Barren Ground of the sub-Arctic.

CHAPTER V

THE LADY OF THE LAKE

THEY traveled more slowly now, keeping a sharp lookout for musk-ox signs. The caribou seemed to have deserted the country. For a week none had been seen. The food for the dogs was going at an alarming rate, and it was plain that unless fresh meat was soon procured the ration would have to be cut in half.

On the third day after leaving the lake the weather, which had been mild, turned suddenly cold, and a blizzard out of the northeast swept down with a blast that bit to the bone. Huddled in the tent the men waited for the storm to pass. No wood was procurable and they were forced to fall back on the primus stove.

After two shivering, wretched days the storm at length cleared and the sun came out, warmer than before. The new snow under its influence crumbled into sandy crystals, making traveling at anything but

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a snail's pace impossible. The Indians commenced to show signs of discouragement and new discontent. They began to say that the musk-oxen had gone north, and that this was a sign of warm weather. They voiced the fear that the ice would leave the lake sooner than they had thought, and at last they openly expressed the wish to turn back.

Hallam, with discouragement gnawing at his heart, laughed at their doubts and ordered them to "mush on." But each day the dogs traveled more slowly, and each day the Indian and the half-breed became more sul-
len. When they camped at night Hallam was almost afraid to close his eyes in the fear that the drivers would steal away and leave him. He longed for the sight of a herd of caribou to give them the fresh meat both men and beasts so greatly needed. But from daylight to dark there were no caribou. The country seemed deserted by all forms of life. For miles in every direction it was a blank, sunlit waste of glaring white, not a tree nor a bush above the snow to break the monotony of its dreariness. In spite of his smoked glass spectacles, Hallam was beginning to suffer from incipient snow-blindness. The pain

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at times was great, but he bore it with a fortitude that was born of a desperate effort to preserve the morale of the trio, for any exhibition of weakness on his part would have at once fomented the breeding rebellion in the drivers.

The weather grew decidedly warmer so that thick clothing became a burden. The snow was scarcely fit for traveling in the middle of the day, and still signs of musk-oxen were lacking.

More than once Hallam felt his courage failing, but the thought of going back, beaten, his prize unwon, to hear Sophia Burton's mocking laughter and her "I thought so" was a goad that caused his jaw to stiffen and his face to turn again resolutely north.

On the seventh morning after leaving the lake, Joe announced that his best dog, the leader of his team, was sick. Hallam, scoffing at first, examined the animal and found it true. It was the spring-sickness, Joe declared, and was likely to spread to the other dogs. Also, there was no cure. The dog might recover; he might die.

"Then shoot him," commanded Hallam.

Joe demurred. It was his best dog, he

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said. He might get better. They could wait a few days and see. The team would not work well without its leader.

But delay for Hallam would be fatal. The only chance of finding musk-oxen was to push on, to make a dash, find a single herd, shoot as many as possible and then head back for the lake, traveling light. Three days might mean the difference between success and failure. It was clear that hesitation on his part would mean the end.

He rose slowly and walked to where the sick dog lay stretched out in the snow, its eyes half-shut, its breath coming heavily from slavering jaws. The animal was easily the finest in either team. He had worked nobly, never shirking, always the leader and the master of the rest. There was affection in him, too, and from the first he had seemed to recognize in Hallam a friend—one who spoke kindly, who rewarded effort and who did not abuse the lash.

As Hallam stood over him the dog lifted his head and feebly wagged his tail. Hallam swallowed something in his throat and stooping, stroked the rough coat.

"Poor old fellow. Poor old boy," he said.

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Then he straightened up and jerked his heavy automatic pistol from its scabbard. There was a sharp crack. The leader of the team twitched once and lay still.

A low exclamation from the half-breed echoed the shot, and Hallam turned. Joe, his face dark with anger, caught at his rifle and sprang up.

"Drop it," warned Hallam sharply, the automatic swinging into line with the man's heart.

The rifle fell.

"Now we'll go on. Pack, you loafers, before the snow gets soft."

The drivers obeyed and the sledges were loaded in sullen silence. On they went, Hallam snow-shoeing behind, his pistol loose in its scabbard, ready to his hand. The weakened team worked more slowly, for the dogs were hungry and they lacked the valiant leader who had kept them to their pace. In two hours they had scarcely made four miles, when, on climbing a steep ridge Hallam suddenly found himself looking down upon the white surface of a lake. On the easterly side was a fringe of good-sized spruce timber. The sight of those friendly trees after the

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deadly dreariness of the barrens was like a glimpse of home.

"Go on, boys," he called, "we'll sit in front of a wood fire tonight."

As they stood for a moment on the summit of the ridge, taking the bearings of the lake, Hallam noticed a strange uneasiness in the dogs of Wolf Bone's team. They were twisting and whining in the traces and sniffing the air with little yelps of excitement. Suddenly the leader dropped on his haunches, and lifting his nose gave forth a prolonged howl. Immediately the others joined in, and the weird chorus went up in a long, tremulous wail, unearthly in its melancholy.

Hallam, puzzled, turned to speak to Wolf Bone, but as he did so the dogs started. Gathering speed with every leap they took the rough slope at a dead run, the loaded sledge, its helm guideless, swaying and slewing in their wake.

"They're running away!" yelled Hallam. "After them, Wolf Bone!" and the two men sprang together down the hill. As they reached the ice Wolf Bone stopped, sniffing the air. Hallam, too, stopped. There was a distinct smell of wood-smoke coming straight

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from the spruce growth up the shore, toward which the runaway team was making top speed.

“Come on!” called Hallam, and dropping his snow-shoes on the ice he sped after the dogs. As he reached the point of a small headland he uttered an exclamation, and signaling the two men to follow, struck in toward the shore.

What he had seen was a log-built house, not a hundred yards distant among the trees. Smoke was rising from the chimney. An open water-hole lay at the end of a well-trodden path to the camp door. The dogs in making a short turn toward the shore had slewed the sledge, which, striking a rock that projected above the ice, had overturned, and, tangled in their traces, the animals were mixed in a hopeless snarl, all fighting tooth and nail. But Hallam did not stop. He climbed the bank with a beating heart, for this meant food, shelter, and above all a human welcome.

As he approached he saw that the door stood half-open. No sound came from within, and without knocking he stepped across the low threshold.

For a second time since he had come to the

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North country, he entered a strange room and saw, lying upon a bunk, the form of a man. And for a second time it was a dead man.

But here, with shoulders bowed until the face touched the covers of the bed, knelt another form. Hallam stood still, his eyes staring. The figure was motionless. Could it be that this also was a frozen corpse?

As the door swung back it creaked and struck against the log wall. In a flash the kneeling figure sprang into motion and there stood facing him—a woman.

CHAPTER VI

NORMA LEONARD

THE instant she turned Hallam saw that she was young—a girl of not more than twenty. Never while he lived did he forget that first flashing impression of her as she stood there, a hundred questions looking from her startled eyes, one hand pressed against her breast, the other extended toward the bunk as if to protect her dead. From head to foot she was clothed in fur, and as the light streamed in upon her from the open door, Hallam saw with amazement that it was the same priceless fur he had come to seek—the skin of the unborn musk-ox calf, silvery gray-brown and softer than any velvet.

The girl's upper garment was cut in a short blouse or jumper, which ended just below her waist. Her legs were encased in closely fitting trousers, tied with thongs below the knees and met by long boots of a different kind of fur.

The hood of her jumper was pushed back

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and Hallam saw that her hair was dark and smoothly, deeply waving, and also that it was gathered in two great braids, whose shining lengths fell in front of her shoulders, down over her breast and half-way to her knees. Her eyes were dark, and he became aware that they were gazing at him steadily from under fine, straight brows, which now were drawn together in a slight scowl of surprise and perplexity.

She was the first to speak.

"Who are you?"

Her voice was low and rich and the tone was level, but there was a certain huskiness and that bare tremor that comes from grief. After her simple question she stood silent, waiting for a reply. There was such quiet dignity in her bearing and in her sorrow that Hallam felt almost as if he had suddenly broken in upon a sanctuary.

"You are in great trouble," he said, gently and gravely.

He looked past her to the form on the bed and saw it was that of an old man.

"Is it—your father?"

The girl bowed her head.

"And you are alone here?"

"Yes," she said.

Hallam swept the cap from his head and took a step toward her.

"My name is Hallam," he said. "I am from the States and traveling to the North. I hope you will let me help you."

The girl still stood without moving, her eyes searching his face with their steady gaze. Hallam returned their look, his face full of sympathy and friendliness.

"How did you happen to find this place?" she asked abruptly, her brows knitting closer.

"It was chance," he replied. "The first we knew was the smell of smoke and the queer actions of one of the dog-teams. Neither I nor my two drivers had any idea there was a human being within a hundred miles."

The girl's eyes slowly left Hallam's face, and for the first time since she had risen she moved, turning toward the quiet figure in the bunk.

Hallam, from where he stood, could see the stern, austere face of a man of seventy, cold, impassive in its marble whiteness. The brow was high and the features were clear-cut. The frame, though wasted, had belonged, once, to a man of noble physique, but the

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hands were not those of one who had labored in youth.

"When did he die?" Hallam asked.

"Just this morning, as the light came," she said. "He had been ill for many weeks."

Something suddenly darkened the doorway and both turned to see the forms of Joe and Wolf Bone blocking it, their eyes wide with curiosity and apprehension. As Hallam started forward to motion them outside his movement disclosed the dead man on the bunk. Each Indian looked at the other with a startled exchange of glances and in an instant the doorway was empty.

In surprise Hallam sprang forward to see both drivers running down the path to the ice. He called to them to stop, but they kept on and he leaped in pursuit. The sledge that had been capsized by Wolf Bone's runaway team had been righted, and stood with the dogs still in the traces at the bottom of the bank. As the Indians reached it the animals began to bark wildly, and dragging the load they bounded straight up the slope toward the house.

Past Hallam they plunged, lustily giving tongue. Looking back he saw that the object

Norma Leonard

of their sudden dash was the girl. She stood in the doorway, and as the dogs reached her they sprang upon her, leaping at her face.

Hallam was by her side in an instant. Seizing a heavy stick he beat the leader off and was attacking the others when a cry from her stopped him.

With amazement he saw her stoop and caress the dog that had received the blow. The animal responded with whines of pleasure, while the rest of the team leaped about her with every evidence of delight.

Suddenly she stood up and bade the dogs be still. Instantly every animal dropped to its haunches and sat gazing at her with rapturous eyes, tongues lolling.

She turned swiftly on Hallam.

"Why did you lie to me?" she demanded

"Lie to you?" questioned Hallam in amazement. "Lie about what?"

The girl's scowl deepened and her eyes grew darker and seemed to blaze at him from under her close-drawn brows.

"About coming here," she accused. "You knew! Where is Sandy?"

"Sandy?" echoed Hallam, still mystified.

The girl made a gesture of impatience.

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"Where did you get these dogs?" she asked.

The light began to break.

"I got them from the town at the end of the railroad," he said. "The night before I reached there from the States an Indian, a Yellow Knife, they told me, had been shot to death in a quarrel with the hotel-keeper. A man named Jackson had the team in charge. He let me have it, and found a Dog Rib Indian named Wolf Bone to drive."

The girl was hardly listening as he finished. She had fallen against the logs of the house wall and leaned there, staring at him.

"Sandy—dead! Who was the man who shot him?"

"His name was McAvey—Angus McAvey, and he is dead, too. The Indian shot him. They drew together, it was said."

"McAvey!" cried the girl. "You say Angus McAvey is dead? Shot by Sandy? And Sandy dead!"

She seemed overwhelmed and stood motionless, her face pale, her eyes staring past him at nothing. Astonishing as the whole thing was, Hallam found himself piecing together the steps that had gone before the double tragedy at railhead. The Indian, Sandy,

had evidently been a servant or a retainer of some sort to this old man and his daughter. McAvey had been factor of a fur post somewhere in the vicinity. The Indian had followed him out of the North and had killed him behind his own bar. So much was clear, but Hallam could reason no further. The motive, if there had been a motive, was still in the dark. The girl's dismay puzzled him. What could she know about it? Had she or the old man sent the Yellow Knife eight hundred miles over the snow to kill, or had the Indian himself, brooding on some wrong done to him by the factor, set out upon an errand of revenge?

As Hallam watched, these things flashing through his mind, he could see that the girl was thinking hard. At last she looked slowly up.

"Did the Indian say anything after he was shot?" she asked.

"I think not," Hallam answered, gravely. "Both men were lying dead when those in the outer room rushed in."

The girl nodded her head abstractedly.

"Father dead, Sandy dead, McAvey dead!" She straightened and looked keenly at Hallam.

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"And you," she said. "Who are you, and what do you want? Are you one of the Mounted Police? I have heard of them. Are you trying to find out why the Yellow Knife killed McAvey, and why McAvey killed him? Is that why you came here?"

"I'm not one of the Mounted," Hallam said. "My name is Ransford Hallam of New York City. I have never heard of you or your father. I do not even know your name. I came into the North to hunt, to kill musk-oxen, and for nothing else. I hope you will believe this, because if so you will make it easier."

"Why easier?" she flashed.

Hallam was taken a little aback.

"What are you to do, alone, here?" he asked. "How were you planning to live, or to reach civilization? I should like to help you if you will let me."

The girl smiled in a slow, almost scornful way.

"I have lived here a long time," she said.

"I am at home here."

"But now you are alone," insisted Hallam, "you cannot *stay* here alone, a girl like you. You will have to go back where you can be

Norma Leonard

cared for, to your relatives, your people. You will have to go back with me."

She smiled again, the same scornful smile.

"But you are not going back," she said. "You are going to hunt musk-oxen. You have come a long way. Besides, where should I go? I have no people. My father and I were alone in the world. We have been in the North ever since I was a child. I have no place, even if I wished to go."

As she spoke, the tone of her voice, which had been hard at first, grew gentler, and from the doorway in which she stood she glanced inside at the form of the dead man.

Hallam suddenly held out his hand.

"Shall we be friends?" he said. "Will you tell me your name?"

She gazed into his face steadily a moment without moving. Then she slowly laid a hand in his. It was a large hand, well shaped and strong, and it filled Hallam's palm warmly. As he held it her grip tightened a little and his own clasp grew firmer to meet it. Still looking at him she said:

"I think you are telling me the truth. I believe you. My father was Norman Leonard. He called me Norma."

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Norma Leonard. It had a simple euphony about it that fitted her, he thought, this tall, strong girl with her low, rich voice and her calm, almost stately dignity.

"Miss Leonard," began Hallam, but seeing the puzzled look in her eyes he stopped, divining its cause. She probably had never been called "Miss" in her life.

"Shall I call you Norma?" he asked.

"Why, yes, of course. What else?"

"I wanted to ask if you had thought about what you wish to do with your father's body. If there is a grave to be prepared would it not be well for you to choose a spot? It may take some time to thaw the ground."

"There is nothing to be done," she said, evenly. "Before the sun sets we shall be ready. Will you come then? There are some things I have to do, now, and I think he would not like strange people about."

Hallam bowed silently and stood watching as she entered the house and closed the door.

CHAPTER VII

THE GRAVE AMONG THE SPRUCES

NOTICING the dogs of the runaway team still lying in their traces, Hallam loosened them, and one by one as they were freed they disappeared around a corner of the house. He followed and saw them clustered about the entrance to a small hut of logs, evidently built for a kennel. A shout from the lake turned his attention to the Indians, who, with the other team, were standing well out on the ice waving to him. He smiled at their panic fear of a dead man, but when he reached them he perceived that it was something more than that.

Joe and Wolf Bone greeted him with the most extreme gravity of demeanor, and sitting down upon the ice invited him to a conference. Pipes were lighted before either spoke. Then Joe asked:

"When you move on, Hallam?"

"I don't know, Joe," Hallam replied.
"The old man, this girl's father, died this

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morning. He is to be buried before sundown. The girl can't stay here alone. She will have to go on with us."

"No," said Joe.

Wolf Bone grunted, vigorously shaking his head.

"What is the matter?" Hallam demanded.

Both men were silent.

"What are you afraid of?" he went on. "An old man who is dead? You act like a pair of children. What made you run away?"

"This place bad. No good. We go to-night," said Joe firmly.

"But why?" insisted Hallam. "Are you afraid because of the way the dogs behaved? I can tell you about that. The dogs came from here. The Yellow Knife that killed McAvey lived here with the old man and his daughter. They were glad to get home, that was all."

The Indian and the half-breed exchanged glances.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Hallam went on. "I myself will bury the dead man, and when that is done we will take council, and in the morning we will make a plan."

Joe addressed Wolf Bone rapidly in his

The Grave Among the Spruces

own language, and the Dog Rib nodded assent several times, replying shortly in his own deep gutturals. Joe turned to Hallam.

"We stay tonight," he said, "but we not go near house and dogs must not go near. We camp in trees on that point, and at sun-up we go. We do not like this place."

Hallam, disturbed and angry, could make nothing of it. To reason was useless, and to make threats was equally of no avail. The men would not move an inch from the stand they had taken. Neither would they explain the cause of their aversion to this lonely dwelling by the ice-bound lake.

Finally, leaving them to make their camp among the spruces on the point, Hallam took his way back to the house. As he approached, the door swung open and Norma appeared. She did not notice him at first, but stood in the long shaft of sunlight that fell through a break in the trees. The strange grace of her figure, clothed in shining, velvet fur, straight-limbed, lithe, strong, yet lightly poised, the calm beauty of her face, framed in the dark hair that fell on either cheek, made Hallam pause an instant to gaze. But it was only for an instant. She saw him and spoke.

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"Where are the dogs?" she asked.

"I loosed them and they made at once for their kennel."

She stepped to the corner of the log house and gave a low whistle. Instantly the five dogs came bounding to her.

"Will you unload the sledge?" she asked. "We shall need it."

Hallam set about undoing the lashings and placing the packs in a pile against the house while she harnessed the dogs. He wondered at their docility under her hands, for while ruled by the long lash of Wolf Bone the team had been a snarling pack of rebels from the start.

When the sledge was ready Norma turned toward the house. Hallam was about to follow, but she stopped him with a gesture. In a moment she reappeared, bearing in her arms a long, dark shape wrapped and corded with thongs of rawhide in the shaggy robe of a musk-ox. She stooped with her burden and laid it gently on the sledge, while he marveled at her strength and lack of effort. Rising she faced him

"Now I am ready," she said. "Will you go with me?"

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She carried no whip, but guided the dogs by voice alone, and as they filed behind the sledge, winding in and out between the spruces along a trail that some one had recently traversed, Hallam saw for the first time a tear make its way down her cheek and lie for a second upon her breast, sparkling in the sun like a single diamond.

They had followed the high land along the edge of the lake for perhaps half a mile when there rose before them a sharp ascent, up which the dogs trotted at a smarter gait. Norma ran behind and guided the sledge by its "gee pole." Hallam, following, found himself on a flat-topped hillock, ringed about with trees and overlooking the length of the lake. In the center of the ring, he saw an open "grave."

Norma brought the dogs to a halt and turned.

"You will wonder at this," she said. "My father was prepared, you see. He chose this place long ago and made it ready. This morning I came here and dug away the ice and snow. Over there are stones to lay in until it is filled."

Looking down into the pit Hallam saw at

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the bottom a rude structure of hewn logs, made like a box to receive the body. There was also a cover to be lowered over it.

The girl stooped over the bundle on the sledge and untied the strips of rawhide that lashed it in place.

"Now," she said, and together they carried the dead man in his wrappings of fur to the edge of the grave. Silently, by the long thongs they lowered the body to the bottom.

"Norma," Hallam said, using her name unconsciously for the first time, "would you like to be alone here for a little while?"

She shook her head.

"Would you like me to repeat what I can of the service for the dead?"

"No," she said.

So together they brought the stones, small and large, from a pile where a fire had been burning to melt the snow, and together they filled the grave.

At last, when it was done they turned away, and following the dogs as before, drove the empty sledge back through the spruces in the twilight. So silent, so stoical did the girl seem that Hallam forebore to speak. When

The Grave Among the Spruces

they reached the house, and the dogs had been freed of their harness, she asked him to enter.

"It will be lonely," she said. "I do not wish to be alone."

"I will go and see to my camp, and then come back."

"For the night," she said, with some decision. "I do not wish to be alone, tonight."

In the gathering darkness Hallam could not see her face, but the words were so simply spoken that the utter unconventionality of the request did not even occur to him. His only feeling was one of sympathy for her loneliness. It seemed quite natural that she should want some one with her.

Crossing the cove he found the Indians with a tent pitched and a fire burning. When he told them that he had decided to sleep in the house they glanced quickly at each other, but they did not try to dissuade him.

"In the morning," Hallam told them, "we will arrange what is to be done," and swinging a light pack of personal belongings over his shoulder he started back across the ice.

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As he neared the house he saw that a light streamed from the window.

Norma called "Come in," in answer to his knock.

CHAPTER VIII

A SINGULAR HOSTESS

AS Hallam pushed open the door of the cabin he was struck with the warmth and cheeriness of the interior. In the center of the single long room there was a stone chimney with a fireplace, in which there was burning, not logs of wood, but lumps of what he recognized to be cannel-coal, the bright flames from which flooded the space in front with flickering light. On a chain suspended from the roof hung a large oil lamp, and at the other end of the room, back of the chimney, he could see two others. For furniture there were chairs, heavily constructed of hewn timber, but luxuriously upholstered with caribou hides. A heavy square table stood under the lamp, its rough top covered with a beautifully tanned skin. Caribou horns decorated the chimneypiece, and across them rested a shotgun and two repeating rifles. At either side of the room was a bunk, furnished with robes of fur.

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Norma was not to be seen, and Hallam had time to note the few details the interior offered. After a moment he heard a light step and the girl appeared from behind the chimney.

She was no longer clothed in the suit of musk-ox fur in which he had first seen her, but wore a long robe, evidently made of a gray wool blanket, which fell nearly to her feet. She had tried to give the garment a feminine touch, for it was furred about the throat and sleeves, as well as girdled with softest of sable. As before, her two great braids of dark hair fell before her shoulders and well down below her waist, the ends unbound and tasseling out in thick, shining masses.

For a moment she stood looking at him.

"You will stay?"

Hallam nodded.

"That is good," she said, nodding her head, "you can have my bunk. I will take this one," pointing to that on which her father's body had lain. Have you eaten?"

"Not since morning."

"Sit here," she said, pointing to a chair at the table. "I know what a hungry man is like, and how to treat one."

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She swiftly disappeared behind the great chimney and returned bearing a large pot, which she hung on a crane in the fireplace. As she lifted the lid the appetizing odor of garlic faintly arose from the steaming contents, which she ladled out upon two tin plates. She swept the tanned skin from the table and laid one of these before Hallam on the bare boards. The other she placed opposite and disappeared at the rear of the room. When she came again she bore forks, knives and spoons and two tin cups of tea.

"Eat," she said, seating herself in her place. "There's plenty."

To Hallam it seemed as if no food he had ever tasted was the equal of that savory stew, that no tea he had ever drunk before, was of half the fragrance of that steaming infusion in the tin cup. Between mouthfuls and sups he watched the girl, surprised to see that she ate with all the delicacy that he was accustomed to find in women.

She said little until the plates were empty and the meal ended.

"There should be bread," she remarked, as she finished the last of her mug of tea, "but I have had no time these last few days."

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She rose and cleared the table, and Hallam, left alone, heard her rattling the plates in the dishpan.

Full to repletion, comfortable, warm, and dry for the first time in weeks, he turned his chair to face the fire, wondering whether he should offer to help her. But before he had made up his mind the work was done.

“Do you mind my smoking?” he asked, as she came to the fire, drying her hands on a coarse cloth.

She looked down at him in surprise.

“No,” she said, “all men smoke.”

Hallam smiled and filled his pipe. He was frankly puzzled. With women, as a rule, he got on well. Women liked him. He was never at a loss with them—women of any degree. But here was a woman who was different. He could not make her out. She was neither friendly nor unfriendly, neither interested nor indifferent. She had apparently accepted his coming and the slight aid she had permitted him to render her as a matter of course. That she seemed to trust him after her early doubts had been disposed of, even to the point of admitting him to the house, was distinctly strange. At first he

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had thought nothing of the invitation. Now that he had seen the single room with its two unscreened bunks, Hallam wondered. She must be either very innocent, he thought, or else entirely confident of her ability to protect herself.

As he lighted his pipe he cast about for some opening, for while he wished mightily to learn her history, her reticence so far had made him cautious of her displeasure. The sight of the coal in the fireplace quickened a thought in the back of his mind.

"You burn coal," he commented, "where do you find it?"

"On the shore of the lake," the girl answered. "There are tons of it lying about on the ground. I will show you our store-houses."

She took a lamp from a side-bracket and led the way to a door at the rear. In passing the chimney Hallam saw that there was a cooking range of small size that glowed warmly in the dimness of the space. Swinging back the heavy-timbered door the girl held her lamp high, disclosing a low shed-like place heaped to the roof with glistening black masses. Tons of fuel were stored there. In one corner stood three casks.

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"Oil," she said briefly. "Father found a way to distil it from the coal. It is such a comfort—the oil. The winter nights are very long here."

While Hallam still marvelled she closed the door and threw open another. A rush of cold air nearly blew out the lamp and she quickly shielded it with her hand. In this freezing space hung the carcasses of nearly a dozen fat caribou, and on one side there were great bags made of hides, filled to bursting. One stood open and Hallam, reaching over, plunged in his hand. He turned to Norma inquiringly.

"Wheat," she answered to his unworded question, "and barley. We raise them both in the valley of the inlet. There were some small vegetables, too, but they did not do well this year, and the last have been eaten. I am sorry."

As they turned back into the warm room Hallam thought of the man whose body he had helped to bury that afternoon. What sort had he been? Where had he come from? Why had he chosen to live in this sub-Arctic wilderness, wresting from the earth and from the wild animal life a living for himself and

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his daughter? What was his purpose? What secret had he hidden with him in his grave within the ring of spruces?

A man who could raise wheat and barley in the heart of the Barren Ground, who could distil oil from cannel-coal, who could live in comfort and die in peace in this great, untenanted land, who could rear a daughter to womanhood in the midst of such desolation, could have been no common hunter or prospector.

"How long have you lived here?" Hallam suddenly asked as they reached the fire.

"Not long," she replied, looking at him steadily. "Four winters ago, we came here."

"And before that?"

"We lived in many places, hardly ever for more than one winter and summer. They were not as good as this, and we had no coal, or good oil, or grain."

Hallam pulled on his pipe and looked at the fire. The girl dropped easily into a chair and stretched her moccasined feet toward the hearth.

"Norma," he said, "won't you tell me about yourself?"

The girl looked up at him, frowning slightly

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as she had when they first faced each other, hours before.

"Why do you wish to know?"

"Would I be human if I didn't?"

"I don't know," she said, "I have never known but two human beings since I was so small that I can hardly remember."

"Only two human beings?" gasped Hallam. "Your father and—who else? Your mother?"

"No. My father and Sandy—the half-breed that Angus McAvey shot to death," she replied, her voice growing hard and her frown deeper.

Hallam's thoughts went back with a rush to the little frontier town and the story of the duel across the hotel bar. It seemed months ago. He recalled Norma's half-stunned surprise at the news he brought, and the hopeless look that had come into her eyes.

"Why won't you tell me?" he pleaded. "You have shown your trust by asking me to stay here. Surely it is not strange that I should wish to know?"

The girl looked at him, as was her habit, straight between the eyes.

"Not tonight," she said shortly. "Per-

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haps tomorrow I will tell you something. It is getting time to go to bed."

She rose, and going to the door, dropped a heavy bar into place across it. The two small windows she shuttered and barred also. Hallam wondered at her calmness and poise. His presence apparently did not concern her in the least. She went about the room, putting things to rights with the sure touch of the practiced housekeeper. The lights in the rear of the room had already been extinguished and only the lamp in the center now remained.

"The light from the fire will be enough," she said, and mounting to the seat of a chair she fanned the lamp out with a wave of her sleeve.

At once she walked to her bunk and, throwing back the coverings of fur, lay down.

"Good-night," she said.

Hallam, still sitting by the fire, had watched her curiously. Her bed-going was as simple as was everything else about her. There was no embarrassment, no false modesty. He was suddenly left to his own devices, and knocking the ashes from his pipe he unlaced his moccasins, stripped off his coat

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and without further ado rolled himself in the great robe of mink skins he found on his bunk.

“Good-night, Norma,” he said.

There was no answer.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAILING IN THE NIGHT

IT was a long time before Hallam slept, but soon, as he lay watching the flickering shadows of the fire on the front wall, the regular, placid breathing of the girl in the bunk across the room told him that his presence had not interfered with her habit of slumber.

Now that he was left alone with his thoughts the strangeness and unconventionality of his presence in the room impressed itself upon him. He went over the events of the day, one by one; the strange behavior of the dog team; the finding of the cabin in the spruces; the dead man; Norma; the apparent fear of his half-wild guides; the burial on the knoll by the lake; the return to the house; and at last the girl, herself, reticent, singularly unafraid, a trifle brusque, utterly unconcerned.

What manner of girl was this, he asked himself—brought up in the wilderness by

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the man he had seen lying dead—a stern, old man, by the look of him once a gentleman, perhaps an adventurer with the impulses and the love of a free life, passed on to him by some pioneer ancestor; perhaps a man with a great sorrow, a recluse, hiding himself from mankind and selfishly requiring the same sacrifice of his child; perhaps a criminal, secluded from the world.

Norma's beauty, her intelligence, her courage, her physical strength, the evident natural refinement of speech and manner that must have come from her father, all stamped her as unusual, unique, a young woman certainly to be studied and drawn out with patient tact.

Hallam decided that to press her for her story would be useless. If he would know it he must first gain her respect and confidence. She was at home here, independent and undismayed. Doubtless her resources were vastly greater than his, a mere tyro in the craft of the Northland. He felt that she was quite able to take care of herself, whether she chose to live here, alone, or to make her way to civilization.

Civilization! He wondered how much she had been told about the world—his world.

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She had not seen it since she had been a child. He wondered if she had read of, or had been taught to picture, the places that teem with humanity, and whether she had dreamed of some day leaving the great open spaces and herself becoming a part of the life he knew. It suddenly occurred to Halam that he had not seen a book or any printed thing about the cabin. Was it possible that she had never been taught to read? He remembered her conditional promise to tell him of herself tomorrow. What would that telling reveal?

Gradually from Norma and the mystery of the lonely house of logs his mind drifted back—back, through what now seemed to him ages of toil and many happenings, to that other girl whose challenge, half curious, half contemptuous, had sent him forth upon this adventure. He fancied her incredulity when he should tell her of this part of it—his meeting with this young goddess of the Barren Ground, and how he had become, on her invitation, the sharer of her sleeping chamber, where she even now lay, screened from him only by the white, impenetrable curtain of her own unconscious chastity.

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Finally he grew drowsy. He was warm, comfortable. The hazy thought, how comfortable, was slowly drifting through his fading consciousness when he became unpleasantly aware of a sound. It was a low, unceasing murmur, now increasing, now diminishing with uncertain timbre; now rising, now falling in pitch, like the grief-wail of a woman. Hallam became broad awake and listened intently. The wind was coming up. He could hear it whistling in the low-hung eaves and sighing through the tops of the spruces outside. But the noise that had aroused him was not the wind.

He gave his attention sharply toward the bunk in which the girl lay. The sound did not come from her. It seemed to come from nowhere—yet from everywhere. The wind began to blow harder, and with it rose the sound. Now it seemed like a chord, a harmony of tones; now it fell again to a voiceless murmur.

Once, puzzled, disturbed, strung to a tension of which he was ashamed, Hallam almost spoke to wake the girl and ask the meaning. He raised himself on his elbow, his ears straining at the mystery, but he

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fell back with the call unvoiced, a feeling of chagrin conquering.

After a time he heard her stir. He saw her raise herself and lay back the robe that covered her. She was getting up. Hallam lay still and watched, covertly. Slipping out of her bunk she found her moccasins and approached the fire. She glanced at Hallam's bunk, and satisfied that he was asleep she noiselessly lifted a great piece of cannel-coal and laid it on the dying embers. The flame shot up, yellow and strong, throwing her stooping figure into high relief against the shadows of the room. Silently she crouched before the blaze, spreading out her hands to its warmth.

The wind blew fitfully and the sound that Hallam could not explain wavered with the gusts. The girl paid no attention, but knelt by the fire, staring into the heart of it, her eyes fixed in the emptiness of reverie.

Lying far back in the shadow Hallam could see, beneath the soft fur that edged her gray robe, the rise and fall of her young breast. He saw her clasp her hands and carry them to her heart, then to her face, covering her eyes. Her figure collapsed a

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little within itself, and above the whine of the wind and that other sound he heard a sob.

Suddenly his heart went out to her in a great wave of warmth. As he watched, his own eyes grew moist and his throat tightened. He forgot the sound; he forgot everything, except that she was a young girl, alone, grieving for the father who was gone from her forever.

His impulse was to go to her and lay his hand upon her and offer her what comfort the presence of another human being might bring. He stirred. She heard, and the spell was broken. Instantly he saw her face change and her figure straighten. She rose, and without looking at his bunk went swiftly back to her own.

It had been but a glimpse, but Hallam was glad he had seen. He was not conscious of having intruded upon her. It had been given to him, rather, to know that for all her calmness, her poise and her repression, this young girl was like other girls, a very human soul, grievously hurt by the hand of death—and sorrowing.

As he lay thinking, he felt that the sym-

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pathy which had silently leaped from him to her might somehow have reached her, and that henceforth there might be a better understanding between them.

The wind still rose and fell, but more faintly. The sound still murmured, but more softly. The tension was gone, and Hallam, watching the dancing shadows on the wall, fell asleep.

When he again awoke the day had come and the light from the clear east was flooding a yellow path across the room. His first glance was toward Norma's bunk. She was not there. The fire was burning briskly on the hearth, and listening he heard the barking of the dogs in their kennel outside. A light step sounded at the rear of the room behind the chimney and he caught the sound of water, splashing in a basin.

He wondered whether rising would cause him to intrude. He lay back to wait for her to appear, or to give some sign. The splashing ceased and in another moment the girl stepped within his range of vision. She was clothed again as he had first seen her, in the full suit of musk-ox fur. She walked quickly to the door at the front of

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the cabin and threw it open, standing in its path of white light and gazing out across the frozen lake, a straight, slim, boyish figure. The breath of cold air that came past her was sweet and fresh. Hallam raised himself and threw back his furs. At the movement she turned and closed the door.

"Good morning," Hallam said.

"Yes, a fine day," she answered. "We will have something to eat directly. You will find a basin back here."

Hallam swung out of his bunk and accepted the invitation, splashing his face and neck with ice-cold water, while she stood waiting with a piece of coarse linen for him to use as a towel.

He thanked her and used it gratefully, a luxury he had not known for weeks. A mirror showed him the unbecomingness of a stubby growth upon his cheeks and chin, kept from undue length by a pair of clip-pers, and he vowed he would use his razor at the first opportunity.

His comb being deep in his pack, he smoothed his rough hair with his hands as best he could, and turning away found Norma still looking at him. She had loosened her

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two great braids and her hair fell about her like a dark cloak of smooth silk, covering her halfway to her knees. She smiled slightly at Hallam's attempts to subdue his tawny locks and held out to him the comb she herself was using. Half-embarrassed by the offer, he took it, used it, and handed it back, whereupon she went on, straightening the tangles of her own dark tresses most unconcernedly.

"Your hair is wonderful, Norma," Hallam said, watching her.

"Is it?" she returned. "I like it, too. It's so soft, and it keeps me warm when the long nights come. Ah, I'm glad they're gone. They are the worst part of this country."

She braided her hair quickly into its thick plaits and became busy about the stove.

"I think perhaps I'd better see to my men," Hallam said. "Can I help you in any way now? I will be back shortly."

Hallam found his fur cap and outer coat and started down the path to the lake. When he reached the shore he looked toward the point. A thin column of smoke rose from among the trees, and he struck across

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the cove. In five minutes he reached the other side and called to Joe. There was no answer. He bounded up the bank. The smouldering remains of a campfire greeted him, but that was all. Indian, half-breed, dog team, sledge—everything was gone.

CHAPTER X

A BARGAIN

FOR a moment Hallam stood dumb-founded and in dismay. Then he swore, man-fashion. Next, he took note that the place must have been deserted hours before, and that the fire had probably been piled high, that its smoke might deceive him into the belief that the drivers were still in camp. He traced the trail of the sledge across the point and out onto the lake to the place where it swung into the tracks of yesterday's arrival. Looking down the length of white surface and up the ridge he could see nothing of the fugitives. They had made a long start. On foot it would be impossible to overtake them.

At first Hallam thought of harnessing the other dogs and making a wild dash—but there was Norma. The dogs were hers, and if she should refuse to go he knew that he could not drive them effectively enough to make better time than the Indians. And

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even granting that he could come up with them, would they return at his command after having openly mutinied? There might be a fight. He might be wounded and left helpless, or even killed. What would become of Norma, alone, without dogs, perhaps with a desperately wounded man to care for?

Slowly he retraced his way to the house among the spruces. He pushed open the door and entered. Norma may have seen his trouble in his face, for she set a dish she carried on the table and looked at him inquiringly.

"They're gone!" he exclaimed, "men, dogs and all—cleared out in the night! God knows how far they've got by this time. I'm marooned."

"Yes?" said Norma, calmly. "I thought that would be the way of it."

Hallam stared. How had she known? Was it a trick? Could it be a trap, set for him by unseen and unknown enemies with this girl as a lure?

He stepped forward. Dropping his hands heavily to the table and leaning across it, he looked sternly into her eyes.

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"What do you mean?" he asked, his voice low and cold as ice.

She looked straight at him, smiling a little.

"I mean," she said, "that it would have been strange for Indians to do anything else. Indians do not like this place. My father saw to it that they should not. Perhaps if you had not slept so soundly you could guess why. The wind blew last night. They must have gone full five hours before dawn, I should think.

"I heard it," Hallam exclaimed, a light breaking on the mystery of the sound. "Do you mean an aeolian harp in the eaves, somewhere?"

"Yes," she said, "one in the eaves, and more, many more in different places among the spruces. They sound at night like the wailing of damned souls, my father always said. The Indians all through the country have heard of the Sound. No Indian ever comes here of his own free will. If they come by accident, as yours did yesterday, they never stay. It is an evil place to them."

"Then that," demanded Hallam, "was why you asked me to sleep in the house, so

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that if my Indians ran away, I would not know it?"

"Yes," answered the girl, quietly, "that was why."

"And the reason, may I ask?"

"If you will shut the door, so as not to cool the tea, and will eat breakfast with me I will tell you."

She smiled again, and waved a strong, graceful hand toward the table.

Without a word Hallam sat down, she opposite, and they ate in silence. She finished first, and rising, took Hallam's pipe from the shelf above the mantel and filled it from his pouch.

"You'll smoke, won't you?" she said. "Father always took such comfort in it before the work of the day."

Going to the fire she brought a red coal in a pair of small tongs and held it to the bowl.

Hallam drew in the smoke in the silence of astonishment. What manner of girl could this be, who calmly informed him that she knew he was to be deserted, and who was so serenely undisturbed at being left alone with a man she had known less than one

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day,—alone, here, in this isolation at the top of the world?

Norma sat down again in her place and rested her elbows on the table.

“I think you are a good man,” she said, gravely, “and that was why I did as I have done. I knew that the Indian and the half-breed would not stay. Nothing that I could say would have kept them. I could not take down all the ‘damned souls’ from the trees, and I knew, if the wind blew as it does always at this time of the year, that they would go. If you had slept at their camp instead of here you might have gone, too, or you might have tried to stop them and then they would have killed you. In either case I should have been left here alone, and” (she smiled slightly) “you could not have got what you say you have come for—the musk-ox, you came to hunt.”

“And how,” demanded Hallam, “do you think I am to hunt, as it is?”

“I know where the musk-oxen are. I will go with you.”

“You!” exclaimed Hallam. “You, a girl?”

“Yes, I. What difference does it make that I am a girl? I have hunted musk-

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oxen. I can drive dogs and I can do many things that I do not think you can do. I can show you musk-oxen, as many as you wish. Why not?"

The seriousness with which Norma made this proposal caused Hallam to reflect. As she had said, "Why not?" It was unusual, but was it illogical, or impossible? The girl had been brought up, here, in the North country. She knew whereof she spoke. She had hunted and knew where to hunt. She was strong, young—as able as any man to do what she proposed. Why not?

Hallam rose and knocked the ashes from his pipe.

"If I agree," he said, "what comes afterward? Suppose we hunt and are successful, what do you propose to do then—when I am ready to go home, I mean?"

"I was coming to that," she answered. "Sit down."

As Hallam dropped into his chair he noticed that the girl's cheeks were a little flushed and that her eyes had lost some of their calmness.

"If I hunt with you," she said, fixing her gaze upon him in a sweet expression of half-wistful seriousness, "if we hunt, then, after

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that, when the spring has come and the snow is gone from the ground you must promise to hunt with me, but for a different kind of game. If we find it, we will share. If we do not, there will be nothing for you but to go back to the place from which you came. For me—I—do not know."

"What kind of game?" asked Hallam, catching a hint of mystery in her words. "What do you mean?"

"I mean gold."

If Norma had told him she desired a Paris gown Hallam could have been no more surprised. That this girl, child of the Northland barrens, should desire gold was so incongruous that he almost winced.

"Gold!" he ejaculated. "What do you know about gold?"

"My father," she said, gravely, "spent his life in trying to find it. And he did find it, but he lost it at the same time, and now I must take up the search."

"Found and lost at the same time?" queried Hallam. "I don't understand."

"We came here," said the girl, "when I was a child. At that time there was a rush to the shores of the great lake, but the gold was

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not real. It was a form of iron and the men who came there went back, bitterly disappointed. My father and I stayed. We came north. We hunted everywhere, living in one place and then in another, sometimes for one season, sometimes for more, but always alone."

"If anyone found us, my father saw to it that they did not remain. I never went to the trading-posts. Sometimes my father went. More often he sent Sandy, our man, who lived with us for many years, and who is now dead."

She stopped speaking for a moment, and Hallam could see that she was trying to keep back the tears. He reached over and touched her hand as it lay on the table. She looked up bravely and smiled her slight, momentary smile. Then she asked:

"What did you say your name was? I have forgotten."

"My name is Hallam," he replied.

"That is your last name."

"My name is Ransford."

"Is that what people call you?"

"Some of my friends call me Ranse."

"That is better—Ranse," she repeated, "Ranse."

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She went on:

"Two years ago, in the summer season, my father went to the trading-post on the long lake to the east. The factor was Angus McAvey."

Hallam started at the name.

"He wanted father to go with him the next spring after musk-ox, for he was new to the country, having come from one of the company's posts to the south. Father agreed, and in the spring, at about this time, he went to the post, leaving Sandy here with me. They hunted, father and McAvey, and they found musk-ox, but the sun was high and father became blinded by the glare of the snow, as men do in the early spring. While he could not see they came to a place where a great ledge stood bare. And in that ledge there was a vein of almost pure gold."

"McAvey tried to keep it a secret, but father knew and made him tell him, and made him also draw a map of the place. Then they left it, and when father had his eyes again, after a few weeks, he came home. But he did not bring the map, because McAvey had lost it on the way. It did not matter, father said, for McAvey could find

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the place, and they had agreed to go again as soon as the snow was off. But before the time came to start McAvey had been caught disobeying some of the company's rules, and when father went to the post McAvey was not there. He had been sent out of the country, and his knowledge of the ledge and how to find it went with him."

"And Sandy?" exclaimed Hallam, the tragedy of the railroad hotel coming back to him.

"When my father returned he told Sandy of McAvey, and one night Sandy took the team of dogs and went away, without saying where he was going, or why. You have told me what came to him, and what he carried to McAvey. McAvey is dead. He took his secret with him. Now it is I, alone, who knows that there is gold. I must find it, and I will if you will help me."

"Then it was while Sandy was away that your father fell ill?" asked Hallam.

"Yes. Seven nights Sandy had been gone when the illness came. I had been hunting caribou and came home late with my kill, dragging it on the light sledge from the head of the lake. When I came to the house it was

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dark. I made a light and found my father on the floor near the fire. He could not speak nor move his legs or arms. I was very frightened. I laid him on his bed and he understood what I said, but he could not reply. And so he lay, always, day after day, never moving, except to follow me with his eyes. Then, yesterday, in the morning, when I went to him he looked at me and tried for the last time to speak, and then he died."

The girl's gaze dropped and her eyes filled with tears. Hallam, as he had done once before, reached out and touched her hand, but she drew it away and sat silent, trying to gain control over herself.

After a time Hallam said: "Norma, why do you wish to find this gold?"

Her eyes opened wide.

"Every one wants gold," she said. "In the place where we came from it was necessary to have it in order to live, my father said. We could not go back because we had none. That was why we came here. Do you not understand?"

Hallam nodded, gravely. "Yes, I understand. It is the same in New York, where I

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live, and everywhere else. One must have it to live."

Something in his tone caused the girl to look sharply at him.

"You say that queerly. Why do you speak in that way? Is it not the truth?"

"Yes," he answered slowly, "it is the truth. I was thinking, when I spoke, that while gold may be necessary to happiness, there is often much more happiness without it."

"I do not understand that," said the girl. "How can that be so?"

"You will understand it some day," he said. "I wish for your sake that you might not."

Hallam's own words surprised him. From the day of his birth he had been utterly dependent upon wealth, yet here he was moralizing on the evil of riches to this half-wild girl of the North. And the strange thing was that he meant what he said. There had suddenly come to his understanding the revelation of a woman who had probably never seen a piece of money in her life, who was as pure and as unsullied as the snows of her own Northland, who had never known covetousness, envy, jealousy, greed, or the

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yearning for position, and yet who was about to seek the wealth that would make her the slave of all these things. The picture that rose before him of Norma Leonard, untutored, innocent, primitive, returning to the world she had left as a child, to fall a prey to all the wolves that civilization has bred, made him recoil and shudder at its possibilities.

Yet he knew that he would go with her and lend his best aid to her project. If they should be fortunate, then the rest was as it might be. At all events it was the only thing to be done. The girl was penniless, friendless and alone. She could not remain in the North. She could not go anywhere else without money, for she was as unfitted to make her own way as a child. She would never consent to become dependent on charity when she discovered what charity meant, and with means of her own she could hire a tutor or go to a good school.

"Ranse."

Hallam started and looked up. Norma had quietly spoken his name. It had a strange sound from her lips, yet she said it naturally, as if she had known him always.

"Yes," he answered.

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"We must be getting ready."

"How far away do the musk-oxen herd at this time?"

"I never hunted them at this time," she confessed, "but I know. There is a spot three sleeps from here where my father has found them for three seasons. It is an easy journey on the snow."

"How much longer will the snow last?"

"For two weeks it will be good traveling," said the girl confidently. "It may be three or four, but we will say two. That will be more than enough time. We will hunt and then come back here to prepare for our spring journey, which will be by canoe after the lakes open."

"How long should that take?" asked Hallam.

"That I cannot tell."

To Hallam it was a simple proposition. If he still desired to shoot musk-oxen, still desired to prove himself to Sophia Burton, the way was open. The price was a summer in the companionship of Norma Leonard and a search for a reef of yellow metal. Some men would have promised, and after the hunt would have forgotten the bargain. With

A Bargain

Hallam his word was his oath. He held out his hand.

Norma took it—filled it with her own, warm, strong palm.

“It’s a bargain,” said Ransford Hallam.

CHAPTER XI

COMPANIONSHIP

THE remainder of that day and the day following were days of preparation. Norma showed Hallam how to cut up a frozen caribou carcass, after which she boiled great quantities of the meat. Luckily the sledge that Norma's dogs had hauled to her very door in their delight to be at home again, had carried Hallam's personal camp kit, cooking utensils, tent and sleeping bag. Norma examined these things minutely, praising some of them, discarding others. Hallam showed her the principle and working of the primus stove, and she was as delighted as a child with a new toy. They tried it with the coal oil and found that it worked as well as with Hallam's slim stock of alcohol, so that they were in no doubt upon the fuel question. His heavy wool and canvas sleeping bag she disapproved of utterly, showing him one of her own manufacture, with an outer cover-

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ing of caribou hide. She also brought boots of seal skin and light fur clothing, strongly sewn with deer sinew.

"We got these three seasons ago from the Eskimos of the coast country to the north. Here," she explained, "we are on the border of the Eskimo land. The Indians rarely hunt farther north. The Eskimos come here after wood for their sled runners and spear shafts. We trade with them and learn many things. Do you see this?"

She ran to a shelf on the wall and brought a lump of something as large as her head. Hallam took it and it fell through his hands by its unexpected weight.

"That is pure copper. The Eskimos brought it to father from the Coppermine river. They said there were tons of it lying about. Father told me that it would be worth immense sums in gold if it could be taken away."

Little by little Hallam was learning something of that strange man, her father. From what he saw and from what he guessed, he had been once a gentleman, forced through some great necessity or through some peculiar twist in his make-up to come to this desola-

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tion. Hallam was satisfied that Norma knew nothing of the reason, and he forebore to question her too much, for it always brought a cloud across her face, and sometimes the close-drawn frown that he did not like to see.

Norman Leonard had been either by nature or by training a craftsman, as was shown by the hundred ingenious contrivances about the camp. Norma exhibited the still, where they had extracted their oil from the cannel-coal. It was a marvel of simplicity and effectiveness.

But the thing at which Hallam wondered most was the absolute lack of reading matter of any description. A man of Leonard's evident culture, he argued, must have suffered great privation without books, yet there was none to be seen. He wondered again whether Norma could read and write. In his pack there was a copy of an old newspaper, wrapped about some cartridges. He spread it out on his knee and began to read. Norma looked at him curiously.

"What is that?" she asked.

"A New York paper, nearly three months old. Read it if you like. You can't often see such things here, I imagine."

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He held it out to her. She took it uncertainly, holding it with the columns horizontal. Then she saw him looking at her and passed the paper back.

"My father never taught me that," she said.

Hallam put the paper away.

"I will teach you," he said, "if you would like to learn."

Her poise returned instantly.

"Sometime," she said with indifference, and went on about her work.

Tentatively feeling his way, Hallam tried her knowledge of many subjects. Of history she knew something, even dates, but of modern events she had practically no information. She was aware that New York was a great city, but of its life she had only the vaguest idea. She asked him to tell her about it, and he attempted to picture to her in the simplest phrases the appearance and the functions of the metropolis. But he soon discovered that he was treading on shaky ground. He verified his first belief that the girl knew nothing of the fundamentals of human existence, or marriage, or any of the relations between man and woman.

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She had never really known any men except her father and Sandy, the Yellow Knife, for the Eskimos were never allowed to approach the camp and she had seen them only casually as they met on middle ground to trade.

But she was curious. She asked questions, and several times Hallam was hard put to it to evade and still retain the appearance of frankness. Since it was apparent that she was completely ignorant, he did not wish her to discover even enough to give her food for thought or surmise, for while they were alone together it would be a far more simple matter to gauge their relationship to each other without the intervention of the engrossing idea of sex. There was no knowing what was in store for them. It would be better to go on as they were, frank companions with no other thing between them.

As the hours swiftly passed—busy hours for both, the girl became cheerful, even gay, and more than once she laughed, sometimes at the things Hallam said, sometimes at his clumsiness and ignorance of matters that were simplicity itself to her. Her confidence in him, too, seemed to grow, and she

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became frank and open, taking him into her plan of campaign as a necessary adjunct instead of as a useless incumbrance. He noted that she was exceptionally intelligent and quick to grasp ideas, and also that her judgment was keen and certain.

Hallam worked mostly at her bidding. He performed the rougher duties of the household—cut wood for kindling, brought water from the lake, supplied the fires with coal, filled the lamps—was maid-of-all-work. At times she gave him orders as if he were a servant, but he obeyed uncomplainingly, taking reproof as well as praise—and, moreover, he enjoyed it.

When the darkness fell and the lamps were lighted Norma set about cooking the evening meal. It was a simple affair; caribou meat, stewed and broiled, hot wheaten bread, and tea. But to Hallam no meal had ever been more satisfying.

It seemed quite natural to be sitting at table opposite this girl companion, who asked such naïve questions with the best faith in the world, and whose dark eyes looked at him, now questioning doubtfully, now sparkling with delight.

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She was principally curious about New York, and asked countless questions concerning its life and its people. Hallam answered readily, describing the city in its physical aspects, trying to give her in the simplest manner possible some idea of its vastness and the complexity of its interests. He saw that it would be too much to expect her to grasp even a small part of what he told her, for often he was obliged to stop and explain the very words he used in his description. There seemed to be no basis upon which she could visualize.

"Did you never see a city?" he asked in despair.

"No, never."

"But you must have come from *some-where*," argued Hallam, at his wits' end to make her understand. "You must remember something of your childhood."

"Oh, yes," she exclaimed. "I remember. I rode on a railroad, once, just before we came to the North."

"Then you surely must have passed through a city, or started from one."

"No," she replied, "before we came here, father and I, we lived on a great open plain,

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miles from any one. I cannot remember when we lived anywhere else. Our house stood in the prairie, and all about were fields of grain. When it was ready to cut other men came and helped, and there was much noise and loud talk. Then they went away, and after a time father hauled our wheat to the railroad. I used to go with him and watch the trains roar past. But there was no city, only a few houses and a tank filled with water, where the engine that drew the train always stopped and drank."

"Was this place in the United States or in Canada?" Hallam asked.

"The United States," answered the girl quickly. "We are Americans, father and I. See!"

She jumped up and going to a cupboard returned with something in her hand. She shook it and the Stars and Stripes floated out as the silken fabric unrolled.

"Father kept this always very carefully," she said, "and on a certain day in the summer he always fastened it to a pole in front of the house and it flew there until the next day. He taught me that it was to be respected and loved and that it was the

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American flag, the flag of our country, which would protect us always, wherever we might be."

Patriotism from a girl who had practically never heard of New York, who had never seen a trolley car, nor an electric light, who had never heard of a telephone, who had no notion of what a theatre might be, who had never so much as possessed anything that might be called a dress in her life, and for whom such a thing as a corset had never existed! She might have been the first woman, so far as worldly knowledge was concerned.

Hallam reflected. It would not do to tell her too much lest she begin to doubt the truth of it. He must go slowly, leading her from one wonder to another. He must train himself to consider before he spoke, that she might not grow confused and discouraged by the very depth of her ignorance.

He foresaw in their enforced companionship a distinct pleasure. It would be possible for him to mould this girl to his liking. If he were wise she would believe whatever he told her, and he might tell her what he liked. He resolved that he would be true

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to the strange trust so casually thrust upon him, and that he would endeavor to instil into her virgin mind only those ideals which should make for good.

He felt a responsibility that grew as he thought of it. His own life had been none too free from lapses, yet he believed he possessed, deep down in his heart, at least a fair share of what the world calls righteousness—enough, at least, to set this young girl upon the straight road.

It would not do to be too serious. A light, sure touch was what was needed here. He must not let his pictures of the world frighten her or lead her imagination into gross exaggerations. But he soon saw that he need not fear the latter. Her good sense, her well-developed reasoning powers, and her faculty of deduction and induction would place her beyond that danger. His principal difficulty would be to hold in check the thirst for knowledge that he already saw quickening within her.

After the meal their positions of instructor and pupil changed again, and Norma showed Hallam how to mend a dog harness with stripped caribou sinews for thread, and an

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awl of ivory from a walrus tooth, purchased in trade from the Eskimos.

That she was thinking deeply of the things he had told her was shown, when, time after time as she worked, she flung her questions at him, questions, too, that Hallam was forced to summon his best ingenuity to answer.

"Why do people collect more things than they need?" she would ask. "Why do they not allow the others who need them to have them? It is that way with the Eskimos. With them each man takes what he needs from any of the others, uses it and passes it on to the next."

Hallam laughed.

"Norma, you have touched the very root of the problem that is now the greatest the people of the world have to solve. Human greed raised the problem. If you could find a way to stifle that, it would be solved."

"Sometimes," said the girl, dropping the rawhide thongs in her lap, "sometimes I do not like you. It is when you say things like that, which I do not understand."

"It is not your fault," answered Hallam, quickly. "Even the wisest men in the world feel exactly as you do."



HALLAM WATCHED, FASCINATED

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"I think," she said, laying aside her work, "that it is time to sleep."

She rose and went to the rear of the room, while Hallam sat by the fire, smoking. When she came back she wore the long gray robe edged with fur, which, after the boyish, trousered suit of the day, softened the long, slim lines of her figure and gave her a feminine touch that set off the dark beauty of her face, framed in its shining silken plaits. She had a brush in her hand and seating herself began to unravel the great braids and to ply it with long, sweeping strokes upon the soft mass shimmering outspread in the firelight.

"I always do this at night," she explained. "If I don't it gets tangled and doesn't feel right."

Hallam watched, fascinated. Never, he thought, had he seen so beautiful, so feminine a picture as this young girl by the fire brushing her hair, her face glowing with health and youth, her strong, lithe figure bending and swaying to the rhythmic, gentle motion of her arms. He never had seen a woman so intimately before—never in just this way. Her unconsciousness and her absolute inno-

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cence robbed her of anything like coquetry or pose. She was simply natural, virginal, charming.

Once she dropped the brush and Hallam stooped quickly to recover it. She had stooped also and their heads touched, her hair falling over his hands and arms. For an instant he caught the sweet, impalpable perfume of it and felt the cool softness of its silk upon his skin. She laughed as they rose, and taking the brush resumed her task, but Hallam found his breath coming suddenly hot in his nostrils, as a quick flashing quiver shot through his body, and he felt the red blood surge to his face. He turned away and pretended to arrange the robes on his bunk, disturbed, yet thrilled with the contact as he had never been thrilled by any woman before.

When he turned again she had finished and was plaiting the long braids with sure, deft hands.

"You forgot to do that last night," ventured Hallam.

"Yes," she smiled, "I was afraid the wind would begin to blow and you would ask questions. Were you frightened?"

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Hallam laughed.

"No, not frightened, but I confess I was puzzled. I have read of such things as aeolian harps to scare savages, or superstitious people. Perhaps your father had read about it, too."

"I think so," she agreed. "He said something, once, about a man who told about it. His name was the same as the new factor's on the long lake to the east—Stevenson."

Hallam noted it. Norman Leonard had had a taste for good literature. Stevenson, of course—the story of Uma and the Beach at Falsea, with Case and his luminous paint. He wondered why he had not recognized it last night when the wind whined through the spruces and the doleful wail of the harps was in his ears.

Norma moved about the room, putting out the lights. Hallam knocked the ashes from his pipe. The girl went to her bed and wrapped herself in her counterpane of skins.

"Good night," she said.

"Good night, Norma."

CHAPTER XII

THE SECRET OF LIFE

MORNING found them both up with the earliest beam of sunlight. The sledge had been overhauled the day before and put in good condition. The girl directed Hallam to bring it to the door and turn it bottom up. He did so, wondering, and watched her bring from the house a pan full of what appeared to be soft mud.

"Your men didn't know how to make a sled slip easily," she said, "or else they were too lazy."

As she talked she smeared the runners thickly and smoothly with the contents of the pan.

"That looks like mud," remarked Hallam.

"It is," she said. "It will freeze directly. It makes the best runner for this country. If we have warm weather it will melt, but while it sticks it will make it easier for the team." When the mud was frozen she brought

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water and made on the surface a thin, glassy coating of ice.

"We shall have to do this every day," she said, "the ice, I mean. The mud lasts better."

The sledge was loaded with food for themselves and for the dogs, cooked caribou meat, wheat flour, tea and salt. Hallam's primus stove and supply of oil were taken, and the sleeping bags, tent, ice-chisel, extra clothing and several pairs of sealskin boots, a supply of which Norma's father had procured from the Eskimos, and which would keep out water like rubber. Last came the rifles and ammunition. Their snow-shoes topped the load.

Before the sun was over the ridge they were ready. Fires in the cabin were extinguished and the door barred from the inside, Norma proudly showing an arrangement of rawhide thongs concealed under the step by which the bar could be raised again from without.

"Father always laughed at that," she said.

The dogs, sleek and in good condition after their rest, were harnessed and at once fell to fighting. But the girl's voice and the

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crack of her long whip straightened them out, and they plunged down the slope toward the long, white surface of the lake.

To Hallam was entrusted the gee pole at the rear of the sledge. Norma, running at the side, drove the dogs. They headed up the lake, careering wildly, but after the first half mile the animals settled down to a steady jog that they could hold all day.

There was no wind. The sky was bright blue and the snow a glare of white. Hallam wore heavy goggles of darkened glass, but Norma preferred the wooden blinkers of the Eskimo, made with narrow, horizontal slits for the eyes, and which had the advantage of never needing to be cleared of condensed moisture from the wearer's breath.

At the head of the lake Norma consulted the compass that hung at her belt and chose a course to the northeast. With the lake shore the spruce growth was left behind, and as they crossed a low ridge the sweep of the Barren Grounds lay before them, stretching as far as the eye could reach in every direction, white and desolate. At noon they halted, making tea over the primus stove, and ate boiled caribou meat, thawed in a saucepan.

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Hallam smoked his pipe and they went on. In the early afternoon they saw a herd of caribou far to the east, but they were in no need of fresh meat and did not stop. Before dark they made camp, pitching their tent under the lee of a drift and banking it with snow. The dogs were fed and their own meal prepared, the bags were spread, and side by side the man and the girl lay down to sleep the sleep of healthy, tired human beings.

The next day was much the same, and the next. On the third, when they rose the sky was overcast and a biting wind blew down from the north. Hallam was inclined to question the advisability of breaking camp until the weather had shown its intentions, but Norma would not hear of delay. He gave in, as in fact he had surrendered to every suggestion of hers since the start. They repacked the sledge and moved on. The girl changed the course more to the eastward now, and they traveled more slowly, scanning the horizon for the long-desired quarry, for Norma declared that this was the musk-ox country. They might come upon them at any time.

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Towards noon the clouds grew grayer and the wind sharper, and while they were boiling their tea the first stinging flakes of snow slanted through the air. It was plain that a heavy storm was at hand.

Hallam held his peace, ready to follow the girl's lead. She scanned the sky and sniffed the wind.

"We may as well camp," she said. "In an hour we could not face it. There is no use in punishing ourselves or the dogs."

To Hallam the thought of a night in the midst of that bleak, wind-swept plain of snow in the flimsy shelter of a tent was no agreeable thing. Yet he trusted the girl. If she was uncomplaining no word should come from him. He hauled the tent from the sledge and spread it for raising.

"We shall need something better than that before this is over with," remarked Norma. "This is going to be a *storm*."

"What better have we?" asked Hallam.

The girl smiled, and going to the load brought forth a long-bladed knife that looked not unlike a Cuban machete. Choosing a level spot she drew with the blade a circle in the hard-packed snow about twelve feet

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across. Hallam caught her meaning at once.

"A snow house!" he exclaimed. "A regular *igloo*! Do you know how to make one?"

He watched her carve the blocks from inside the circle, and at her direction he lifted them to the circumference, building from inside, each tier drawing inward as it rose in a spiral coil, arching the roof. Both worked, the girl skilfully setting the blocks as he lifted them until they were at last completely walled in. Then, on the south side, below the level of the snow, Norma cut a low doorway and they crawled out to survey their handiwork. A covered passageway was blocked in, where the dogs might sleep, and a curtain of caribou hide hung over the opening.

With the snow blocks that remained a sleeping bench was built across one side of the igloo and the girl pronounced the house ready for occupation. The entire load from the sledge was brought in, the sleeping bags turned inside out and the ice that had formed from the moisture of their bodies pounded off. The stove was set up and snow melted for water. The snow house began to grow

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warmer, and soon it was comfortable to sit with bared head and hands. Outside the night began to fall. The storm increased and the wind whirled the snow in clouds before it. But the man and the girl in the igloo did not mind. They were warm, well fed, cheerful.

"You are lucky, Ranse," Norma said as they sipped their hot, fragrant tea by the light of an oil lantern. "If you had still kept your half-breeds you would have been shivering in that tent."

"Norma," said Hallam, admiration showing in his eyes, "you are wonderful."

"No, not wonderful," she said, a little wistfully, "I am very ignorant and stupid. Tell me more about the girls in the cities. What do they wear? How are they different from me?"

Hallam threw up his hands in plaintive despair.

"If you were to ask me what they *didn't* wear I might tell you better," he said. "They will wear anything that certain men and women in Paris, a great city in France, happen to tell them to. One year their dresses have yards and yards of cloth, silks, satins, vel-

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vets. Another year they will go about in the least they can put on and still have the appearance of being clothed. On their heads they wear arrangements of birds' feathers, wings and tails, and they weave their hair into the most marvelous structures, now winding it round and round, now building it high in a peak, now tying it low in a club. They never know how they are to look from one month to the next. It is bewildering—almost fearful to behold."

The girl's eyes sparkled with delight. During the day, while they were at work upon their journey she was silent, taciturn, sometimes almost grim. She ruled her dogs with a will of iron, and Hallam as well. Her word was law, and the man in him sometimes rebelled, but when the march was done and the evening meal cooked she became almost as a child, sitting before him, her eyes wide in wonder, begging him to tell her more of the great world outside that to her was an immense kaleidoscope, filled with life, color and mystery.

"What do the women do, that they can wear such fine clothes? Do they not work?"

"Some of them do," answered Hallam.

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"Some of them labor to get the bread they eat and to make fine things for those who do not work."

Norma shook her head. "That does not seem right," she said.

She sat silent for a time, playing with her hair. Suddenly she began to twist the great, soft braids about her head.

"There," she cried, "is that anything like it?"

Hallam shook his head. "You have to have pins," he explained, "skewers of iron and shell to make it stay. But don't try it, Norma. I like you better as you are. You are different."

"Why am I different?" she demanded. "If I should go with you back to the places from which you came I could not be different. I would have to be like the others, wouldn't I? or they would stare and point their fingers at me, and I should be ashamed. You would be ashamed, too."

"Yes," he answered, slowly, "I suppose that is so."

She dropped the piled-up plaits so that they fell coiling in her lap, and busied herself with her comb and brush, a duty she had not

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performed since the journey began. Hallam, behind his pipe, watched her dreamily, his eyes half closed. He was thinking of Sophia Burton. He had not turned to her so often of late, but now he compared her to this girl before him, this artless, simple, natural woman, now so naïvely busied with her toilet, making no pretence of coquetry, unconscious of her charm, living hour by hour and by day and by night at his side in virginal innocence and purity—unsuspicious, unafraid, unawakened.

Hallam wondered what Sophia Burton—conventional, iron-bound by the rules and the unlettered by-laws of society, sophisticated, unillusioned Sophia Burton, with her wealth, her devotees, her undoubted position in the social world of two continents; Sophia Burton, correct, morally prim, unbending, cold, artificial, heartless to her inferiors, insolent to her equals—Hallam wondered what she would think of this girl, her absolute antithesis.

Norma finished with her hair and lay back again.

“I have been wondering,” she said presently, “where I came from, where you came

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from—and why. Why am I a woman and you a man?”

Hallam started, dropping his pipe from his lips. The hot ashes fell on his bare breast and he leaped up, nearly striking his head through the roof. The girl laughed and sprang to help him. Hallam tore at his shirt, and the girl, reaching in, seized the pipe, and flung it on the floor. She dug a handful of snow from the wall and thrust it beneath his clothing, laughing all the time at his grimaces of pain. At last the burning dottle was out, but the place where her warm hand had touched him on the naked breast just over his heart tingled with a thrill that would not still. Did she feel something of it, too, or was it the small excitement of the moment that brought the rising color to her face?

They sat down and Hallam hoped that the interruption would cause her to forget her questions. But soon she asked again.

“Why is a man different from a woman? They *are* different. I never felt it until you came. It was not so with my father. I never thought of him as being different. Why was that?”

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Hallam for the moment was silent. It had come. He had hoped, almost prayed that it would not, but he had known that he hoped in vain. What could he say? How could he answer her? How could he put her off?

He lay back on his bed and yawned.

"Please tell me," demanded the girl.

"Norma," he said, "I can't tell you. It is one of the things that each person learns for himself and herself. You will learn, like other people."

"But how? I have never known any people. I may never know any."

Hallam thought, desperately.

"Do you remember your mother, Norma?"

"My mother?" repeated the girl, slowly.
"*Who was she?*"

"Do you not remember a woman who cared for you when you were a little child?" demanded Hallam in utter amazement.

"No," said Norma. "I remember no one but my father."

"And your father never told you of her—your mother, his wife?"

"Never."

Hallam suddenly straightened himself,

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and leaning toward the girl took her hands in his.

"Norma," he said, "I do not understand why your father should have kept the knowledge of your mother from you, or why he brought you to the North and kept you from the world in the way he did. What you are asking is the mystery of life. Neither I nor any man can tell a woman its whole secret. She must feel it, herself. Have you never seen the birds in their nesting? Have you never found the fox and its young? Have you never seen the caribou running together in the fall? All these things you must have observed, and perhaps wondered at. It is the same with us. A man and a woman—a woman and a man. They mate, then come children, like the young of the foxes, and the squirrels, and the caribou."

"I have seen the caribou, and I have seen the young foxes, and the birds in the nest," the girl answered, slowly. "I have seen many strange things, but I never thought of people as being like them."

"It is the same," answered Hallam, gravely, "wild things—men and women. It is the way of the whole world."

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The girl seemed scarcely listening. She sat staring at the lantern between her feet.

"I have seen the caribou," she murmured, half to herself, "I have seen them in the fall and in the spring when the calves are running. Sometimes the calves are lost. I have found them. They bleat pitifully, and sometimes they die."

"They cry for their mothers," said Hallam, "and because they are hungry."

Norma sat silent for a time. her strong brows knitted, lost in thought.

Finally she looked up. "The bull caribou in the fall fight each other. My father and I have found them lying dead, their horns locked together. Why is that?"

"He never told you?"

"No."

"They fight for the possession of some female. The stronger, the one who wins, wins her."

"Are men like that?"

"Sometimes."

"They fight for a woman and the strongest takes her?"

"It is not often a physical battle. They do not always try to kill each other. Some-

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times it is a battle of wits, or personality. Sometimes the woman chooses and the other man goes quietly away. Again, there is no battle at all. The man and woman meet, they grow fond of each other. Then they marry."

"Marry?" inquired Norma.

"They agree to live together. They are not like the animals in that respect. When a man takes a woman she is expected to be his as long as she lives."

"Then it is the man who always *takes* the woman?" she asked.

"That is the custom."

Her frown deepened and she looked at him directly between the eyes.

"I do not think I should like that," she said. "I do not think I should allow any man to take me."

"If you loved the man you might not mind."

"Loved him?"

"If you cared for him, felt an affection for him. You loved your father?"

"Yes, if that is what you mean by love."

"Not exactly. The love between a man

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and a woman is not the same. You loved your father because you were his child."

"Why does a woman love a man, then?"

Hallam hesitated. He wondered if he knew.

"Perhaps because he is stronger—because she is dependent upon him. He loves her, too, perhaps, because that is so."

Norma shook her head, still gazing at him.

"I do not believe I should ever love a man," she said gravely. "You are not stronger than I. I am not dependent on you. Rather, you are dependent upon me. If I should leave you alone, here, you would die."

"That is merely because I do not know the ways of your country," replied Hallam. "If I should take you to a city and leave you, you, too, might die—or worse."

She suddenly rose and began arranging her bed.

"I do not think you explain very well," she said. "I do not understand it all. I think now it is time to sleep. You had better move your bag close to mine. It will be cold by morning and we shall give warmth to each other."

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So they lay down side by side, so close that Hallam, in the lulls between the blasts of the wind, could hear her breath coming softly and regularly as she slept.

CHAPTER XIII

BATTLE

WITH the morning the snow ceased falling but the sky remained cloudy and threatening.

Norma was first astir. As Hallam reluctantly crawled out of his warm bag she pushed aside the caribou skin that hung over the door-hole. The dogs in the snow-arched passageway stirred and barked as she drove them before her into the open. Soon she was back, to find Hallam with the primus stove going and the kettle on.

"This is the day for our hunt," cried the girl, her eyes bright with anticipation. "The musk-oxen will be moving after the storm and there is wind enough to kill our scent. We must get an early start. We shall need the snow-shoes."

They harnessed the dogs, with the sledge light, and leaving the packs in the igloo struck off to the east in the face of the wind. For an hour they traveled with eyes sharp

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for signs. As they left a shallow depression where the snow had packed hard in a huge drift along the edge, Norma, who was ahead, suddenly stopped, holding up a hand for caution. Hallam crept to her side and looked.

There, in the distance, were five black dots. As they looked the dots changed position. Another appeared and still another. Now there were eight in all.

"There they are!" whispered the girl, "your musk-oxen!"

The animals were half a mile away, and at that distance Hallam could not have distinguished them from caribou. In doubt, he said as much.

"Can you see daylight under their bellies?" asked Norma. "No. They are musk-oxen. I know what I see. Come."

They left the dogs in the hollow and walked forward, taking such shelter as they could in the depressions and behind the new-formed drifts. They worked steadily nearer. The animals became distinguishable. They were musk-oxen.

The herd was feeding, pawing and digging in the snow for the moss that lay underneath. Careless in their fancied security of isolation

Battle

they moved here and there, seeking their food, while the man and the woman, advancing slowly, never stopping, never hurrying, drew nearer and nearer.

"Are you a good shot?" whispered Norma.

"Fair," answered Hallam.

"We'll try to get closer."

They were already within three hundred yards, but the wind was growing stronger and they did not fear that the animals' keen noses would find them. It began to snow lightly. At two hundred yards they found a gully that ran nearly parallel with the direction in which they were moving and they followed it for fifty yards further.

"Here is our chance," breathed the girl. "Climb to the edge and shoot from there. We dare not get closer."

Slightly separated, they crawled up the slope and saw the herd, close together, moving diagonally toward them.

Hallam pulled off his fur mitten with his teeth and saw that his sights were clear of snow. He was nervous and his hands fumbled a little as he cocked his rifle. This was the crux of his expedition. This was the reward

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of his journey. Sophia Burton should have her coat.

He wondered which of the eight animals were females. A certain ferocity seized him. Well, he would find out. He would shoot as long as a musk-ox was in sight. He took the nearest and drew his sights on the shaggy shoulder. He forgot Norma, forgot everything but the killing.

It was an easy shot. Hallam fired, the .45-90 roaring through the stillness. The musk-ox staggered. Another shot rang out. It was Norma's. He saw a second ox drop to its knees. His was still standing and he fired again. The shaggy head shook and the animal went down. Hallam immediately chose another and dropped it with the first bullet. Norma got her second.

Hallam became quite cool again. He lay there on the drift firing methodically, making each shot count. Sometimes one was enough, sometimes it took two. Once three were needed to send the stupid bulk to its death. The animals that were not down moved slowly around and around, never attempting to flee, seemingly dazed by the attack. One by one they fell. One, which had been hit

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by Norma, was limping away behind a drift. Hallam leaped to his feet and savagely sent a bullet after it.

He did not hear Norma crying to him to cease. He heard nothing but the explosions of his rifle. When the last animal was down he ran forward. The snow was falling harder and already the black, shaggy coats were dusted with white.

Hallam examined the first one he had shot. It was a bull, probably the leader of the herd. The second was a cow. He felt life stirring and finished her with his knife in her throat. The blood flowed vividly crimson and steaming hot upon the snow.

Norma ran up, still protesting.

"What are you going to do with so much meat," she cried. "We can't carry a third of it. Besides, they are not fat at this time of year and the meat is tough and strong."

Hallam answered shortly, without looking up.

"I'm not looking for meat."

"Their robes?" inquired the girl, glancing about at the eight still forms that dotted the snow. "We shall have a load."

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"No," replied Hallam, again, "not their robes, either."

The girl looked at him sharply, her eyes questioning.

"Perhaps you'd better go back and bring up the sledge," he said. "I will attend to these."

"It will take both of us here," said the girl. "They will be frozen stiff before you can reach the third."

"All right," he agreed, "but the dogs——"

Norma, still questioning, nodded and started back. Before she was out of sight Hallam began his work.

Of the eight, six were cows and these only did he disturb. With his knife he went from one to another, until, on the snow beside each there lay that which he sought.

It was a brutal business and Hallam, his first thrill of excitement spent, loathed himself. Every instinct revolted. It was savagery, pure and simple—savagery done, as it has been done in one form or another during all time, to gratify the whims of woman.

As he stood over the last carcass a feel-

ing of shame drove him almost to nausea. What had he been making of himself? What had Sophia Burton made of him? She had admired the garment of another woman. She had been told how that garment had been procured. He had offered to bring her the material for its counterpart—and knowing how it must be got she had laughed and had let him go.

Suddenly conscious that he was observed, he turned. Norma had halted the dogs in the gully and had run forward alone. She was standing over one of the shaggy heaps, looking down at it. Through the blowing snow Hallam could see her face. There was a horror in it, such as he had never seen on the face of any human being.

All at once she gave a cry. The sound of it struck him to the heart. It was a terrible, moaning sob such as a mother might make who has seen her child slain before her eyes. In that instant Hallam realized that Norma had seen, and that at last the mystery of Life was no longer hidden from her. Even as he watched he saw the change come—the primal instinct of motherhood born within her.

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Suddenly she flung her arms above her head and came straight toward him with the swift, silent spring of the panther.

Dumbfounded, Hallam stood until the actual shock of her body against his awakened him. She lunged for his throat, her weight nearly sending him to his knees. And as she sprang he caught the look in her eyes, a look that concentrated upon him all the hate of the world. In a flash came the realization that this was battle. He must fight, and for his life.

The girl's strength was great. Her hands closed hard upon his throat, but thrusting his arms upward between hers he broke the hold and they faced each other—the woman savage, primitive, the man a product of the world's farthest progress.

So they stood a moment.

"Norma!—Norma!" rasped Hallam, his voice coming hoarse on his drying tongue.

For answer she stooped, and in one sinuous movement seized the hunting knife that Hallam had dropped at her first rush.

"Norma!" he shouted, but like a tiger she was upon him.

He seized her arm as it descended, but

she wrenched it free and struck again, the blade cutting a long gash in his sleeve. Before she could recover he had closed with her. With a shout he clutched her wrist and seized her around the body. She withstood him like a rock and they swayed and struggled, teeth clenched, their faces close together, glaring at each other.

Hallam could feel her hot breath on his neck as she strove to reach it with her teeth. He tried to twist her wrist to free the knife, but he could not. He felt the warm blood pouring down his arm and along his body. He must end it quickly.

Suddenly with a twist he changed his hold, dropping her wrist and bringing his shoulder under her upraised arm. He came to a clinch with her, his arms around her body ever tightening, slowly pressing the breath from her lungs. He felt her gasp within his fierce clutch. She twisted and struck him in the face again and again with her left hand. Hallam took the blows grimly and silently, shaking his head, and burying his face in her hair. Slowly, slowly he felt that he was gaining. Slowly her magnificent strength was beating itself out. He pressed

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her backward, she fighting now to escape the grip that was torturing her, and striving to use her knife. Once she almost freed her arm, and he felt the prick of the point in his shoulder. Clinging hard with his right arm he brought his left under her chin and forced her head backward. She staggered and fell, he upon her. She struggled once, and then lay still, underneath him.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY

PANTING for breath, quivering from exertion, Hallam dragged his weight off Norma's body and slowly rose to his knees, clearing the sweat from his eyes and looking down at her. She was very pale and lay quite still, frowning. For a moment he thought she was unconscious, but her eyes slowly opened and he knew that she saw.

As he looked, her frown cleared, the glint of battle slowly died from her eyes, and into their dark depths there came a different kind of light. She even smiled faintly and lifted one hand. A flash of pain crossed her face and she let it drop back.

"Norma," whispered Hallam, huskily, "are you hurt?"

She moved her head in denial. Her lips moved and he bent his head to listen, his heart pounding. A little sigh escaped her and she closed her eyes again.

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"Norma," he said again, "you *are* hurt. Can you tell me where?"

Again she shook her head.

"I am not hurt," she said in a voice that sounded weak and queer in his ears. "You are very strong. My father could not have done that."

She sighed again, as if it hurt her to breathe and tried to raise herself on one elbow. He passed an arm under her neck and she sat up. As she did so she saw the blood dripping from his fingers and the great rent in his sleeve that her knife had made.

"Oh!" she cried, and suddenly she began to sob.

"Don't cry, Norma," Hallam pleaded as he might have spoken to a tearful child. "It's all right. No harm is done if you are not hurt. Are you sure you are not?"

He noticed that one arm, her right, hung limp from the shoulder. He touched it gently.

"Your arm! Can you move it?"

"Not very well."

"Where does it hurt?"

She repressed a grimace of pain as she tried

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to raise it, and laid her left hand high up across the shoulder.

"It feels wet," she said.

Hallam glanced down. His mitten was stained red and at the same instant he saw the handle of his knife protruding from her back. In the last fierce clinch it had dropped from her hand and she had fallen on it.

"God!" Hallam breathed.

He grasped the handle and drew the blade out. Blood followed through the slit in her coat.

"God!" he muttered again. She was very white and her eyes closed wearily.

He must stop the bleeding, somehow. With the very knife that had wounded her he slit open her jumper at the neck and then her woolen shirt. There were two cuts in the skin over the shoulder blade. The knife had struck it, slid through the muscles and out again. Hallam gave thanks that it was no worse, but the wound was bleeding freely.

With absolutely nothing at hand for a bandage he was in a hard place. There was not even a handkerchief. Pulling her shirt together he laid Norma back upon the snow and looked about. The dogs, attracted by

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the smell of fresh-killed meat, had pulled the sledge out of the hollow and were snarling over a dead musk-ox. He ran to the sledge and rummaged in the deer-skin robes that covered it. He found what he sought, an extra pair of fur mittens and a long rawhide strap, always carried to mend the harness. Leaving the animals to gorge themselves he hurried back to Norma.

Her faintness had passed and she looked up at him with bright, clear eyes, in which lurked none of the ferocity he had seen when she had hurled herself upon him in her strange berserker rage.

"You are badly hurt, Norma," he said. "I—I am a brute."

"You are a MAN," she said. softly and steadily.

"You fell on the knife," he told her. "I have nothing to make a bandage with, but we must stop the bleeding."

He lifted her to a sitting position and exposed the wound. It was still flowing its red stream and his heart choked him as he thought of the possible consequences of infection. Drawing the cut shirt over the shoulder he laid the fur mittens over it and bound them

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tightly with the strap under her arms and about her chest, making a compress.

"That will have to do until we get to the igloo," he said, as he noted the ceasing of the hemorrhage. "I have some bandages in my pack, and some antiseptics. We had better hurry."

He beat the dogs away from the musk-ox carcass and brought the sledge, upon which he placed the girl, covering her warmly with robes.

"Will the dogs stand at your voice?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then," he said, slowly, looking down at her with a grim tightening of the lips, "I will finish what I came here to do."

He turned the sledge so that it faced away from the kill and picked up his knife.

When he finally returned he bore a small bundle of freshly flayed skins, and without speaking he lashed it securely in the peak between the runners. Then, picking up the whip, he spoke to the dogs and they started away on their steady trot.

CHAPTER XV

THE WOMAN LEARNS

IN an hour they were at the igloo. It seemed strangely like a home-coming—the return to this little hut of snow in the midst of that great waste of white.

With Norma once inside, he made her comfortable on her sleeping-bag while he ransacked his packs for bandages. He found them, but his antiseptic tablets were missing. This disturbed him greatly, not upon his own account but upon hers. Visions of sepsis in her wounded shoulder rose before him, and he bitterly blamed himself for the possibility. With the primus stove and the oil lantern both going, the igloo soon became warm. He bared the girl's shoulder, and with a piece of gauze which he had boiled in the saucepan he carefully washed the cuts and drew their edges together with strips of surgeon's plaster. With another roll of gauze he made a compress and then wound the bandage. Norma, pale and brave, uttered no sound, but

The Woman Learns

when it was done he saw that her lower lip was bleeding where her teeth had clenched it.

"By George! You're a brave girl!" was his admiring comment. "Hold your arm so, until I make some sort of a sling."

"How long will it be like this?" she asked.

"I don't know. Two weeks, perhaps."

"Two weeks—like this?" cried the girl in dismay. "I never can go about this way for two weeks."

"You'll have to," said Hallam, grimly. "I only hope the wound won't suppurate."

"What is that?" she asked.

"If it is not cleaned with antiseptics it will not heal well and pus may form. That is dangerous, sometimes."

"I never have noticed that. I have hurt myself often, and so has father. We never paid any attention, and the cuts always got well of themselves."

Had he known it, Hallam should have been more greatly concerned at his own wound than at hers, for the troublesome little pus germ lives only upon the skins of persons within the pale of civilization. In all probability Norma was the host of none, and any wound in her flesh would have healed perfectly

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without the slightest attention to asepsis. Her only danger was in his handling of the dressings with his own civilized and septic hands.

But he did not know this, and the matter troubled him.

His own arm had begun to grow stiff and painful and Norma caught him wincing as he moved it.

"What about yourself?" she asked, pointing to his torn and blood-soaked sleeve. "You must attend to that. Please let me help you."

He stripped to his undershirt, baring his arm. The weeks of life in the open had hardened him and the biceps and triceps met the overcapping deltoid in clean, powerful contours.

"What an arm it is!" exclaimed the girl in frank admiration. "A man's arm!"

The cut was long, though not deep, but it was plain that it would be painful for a few days. With her help he washed and bandaged it as well as possible, and afterward she produced a large needle and a thread of deer sinew, with which he managed to mend his coat. A meal was cooked and eaten.

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Hallam smoked his pipe, and when it grew dark outside they made ready to sleep.

From the moment when Hallam had risen to his knees and gazed into the eyes of the prostrate girl with whom he had fought, neither had spoken a word of the battle or its cause. Norma, after her sudden outbreak of sobbing, due to the reaction from her burst of insane rage, had been strangely silent. She no longer gave directions about what should be done. Hallam noticed the change and wondered at it.

He also had changed. He seemed to have grown more sure of himself. Since leaving the place where they had killed the musk-oxen he had taken command. He had not consciously assumed it, but a new note had been struck. Quietly he had done what seemed to him best and Norma had acquiesced, and it was this that caused him finally to wonder.

He was thinking of it when, after seeing the girl warmly ensconced in her sleeping-bag, he squirmed into his own, close beside her. He waited for her regular breathing. It did not come. She moved restlessly now and then as if she might be suffering. He

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wished he could help her, but he did not know a way. Then he heard her whisper:

“Ransford.”

She had always called him “Ranse” before. He felt a hand upon him and turned his head.

“Ransford,” she said, softer and lower than he had ever heard her speak. “Ransford, can you forgive me?”

Despite the pain from his wounded arm he raised himself on his elbow. Her hand was stretched out toward him, her white, bare arm gleaming in the half-light of the igloo. He did not answer her in words, but took her hand in his own and, bending his head, pressed it to his lips.

CHAPTER XVI

AFOOT IN THE WILDERNESS

WHEN Hallam awoke the light that filtered through the roof of the igloo told him that the storm had cleared and that the sun was shining. His first thought was of Norma. He looked at her, but the flap of her sleeping-bag was over her head. She might not be awake and he forebore to disturb her. The probability of infection in her wound, or rather the uncertainty, as he counted it, troubled him. He foresaw, too, that her impatience at her inability to go about her accustomed daily activities would result in a bad healing, if indeed it did not absolutely preclude it. He felt a tremendous responsibility for her welfare.

In going over the situation he remembered that Norma had told him the day before that the fur-trading post formerly commanded by McAvey was only two days' march to the southeast. The camp that Norma called

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"home" was four. Hallam considered. They would have medical supplies at the post. Stevenson, the factor, might have a wife who could care for Norma. It was the logical solution. They must make the post in quick time.

As he reached this decision he heard the girl stir. She threw the flap from her head and tried to sit up.

He was out of his bag in a moment and commanded her to lie still. She obeyed and smiled her good morning at him through the veil of hair that crossed her eyes.

"Did you sleep, Norma?" he asked, bending over her to see if the bandages were still in place. "I expect your shoulder hurts this morning."

"Yes, a little," she replied to both questions. "And you?"

"Fit as a fiddle," he lied cheerfully, setting the stove alight and filling the saucepan with snow to melt.

"I don't believe you at all," she said, shaking her head to clear the hair away.

She found her comb and tried to straighten out the tangles, but with one hand it was a hopeless task.

"You will have to help me," she said at last.

Hallam clumsily endeavored to do her bidding, but though she smiled through it and forbore to wince, he knew that the comb was an implement of torture in his hands.

As he handled the heavy silken masses, still warm from the night, their fragrance rose to his nostrils, a subtle incense, delicate, impalpable, physically intoxicating. Once, as he stood behind her he felt an impulse to bury his face in the soft meshes. His hands trembled, but he crushed the feeling down.

"There, that will do," said the girl, sweeping the shining lengths before her. "Do you think you could braid it?"

When it was at last accomplished the water was boiling and breakfast was started.

"Norma," said Hallam as they ate, "how far is the trading-post on the Long Lake? You spoke of it yesterday."

"I think it must be about two days from here."

"I am going to take you there."

There was unmistakable decision in his tone. The girl looked at him.

"Why to the post?" she asked, quietly.

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"They will have medical supplies there, and your shoulder can be properly dressed. It may be very important."

"I do not believe so," said Norma, "but we will go if you wish. I should like to see a post. I have never been to one."

Hallam, glad of her easy acquiescence, set about breaking camp. While the dogs were being fed he loaded the sledge. He would have left part of their food supply behind to lighten the weight, for he had planned to have Norma ride, but the girl would not hear of this. There might be a scarcity of food at the post, she said, in which case they would not be welcome. It was often the case toward spring in the North.

As the load altogether would not be excessive, Hallam conceded the point and in an hour they said good-bye to the igloo and turned their faces to the southeast.

There was a great change in the weather from the cold storm of the day before. The sun shone hot and the glare was almost insufferable. Hallam had broken his goggles the day before and the blazing light on the snow was blinding him. The girl noticed his streaming, bloodshot eyes and taking off

her own wooden spectacles made him put them on.

“What will you do?” Hallam asked.

For answer she drew her thick hair down over her eyes, making a dark veil of it, which, so long as there was no frost in the air, would answer the purpose well.

As the morning wore on and the sun rose high, its warmth began to be oppressive. The snow under foot softened, so that snowshoes were a necessity, and the dogs began to flounder in yesterday's drifts. The ice coating melted from the runners and presently the mud, which had lasted well, began to drop, so that they were obliged to scrape off the remainder.

At noon it was hard traveling and they were making poor time. When they stopped for a lunch Hallam noticed that the leading dog lay down, panting, evidently in distress. He laid it to the sudden weather change, but when it was again time to start he discovered that the cause was of a much more serious nature. Norma noticed something wrong, and leaving the sledge spoke to the animal. The dog feebly tried to stand up, foaming and bleeding at the mouth and shaking all over.

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Hallam, who remembered his former experience with what the Indians had called spring-sickness, recognized the disease at once, but he waited for Norma to diagnose the case.

"Do you know what it is?" he asked.

"Yes," she said, looking up with tears in her eyes. "It is the spring-sickness. Poor Kuk-ok-tuk, he has been a good friend. We have had him, as well as the rest, for three years."

Hallam examined the four other animals. Of one he was suspicious, but the other three showed no symptoms of anything except the heat.

"We shall have to leave him," he said, "If the sickness is contagious, as I have heard, Kuk-ok-tuk must be killed."

"I know," said Norma.

She stroked the sick dog for a moment and he raised his head as if to say good-bye. Hallam cut off the harness and taking the animal in his arms walked back on the trail. There was a shot and he returned, alone.

They started, both walking to save the team, but within an hour the second dog, who was now the leader, was stricken. The

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three dogs that were left were too few to haul the loaded sledge alone, and Hallam took a line ahead and helped them. Long before dark they halted and made camp. With the lengthening shadows the temperature dropped, and it began to freeze. Hallam insisted on making an igloo, though the girl would have slept in the tent. He had his way, and at the end of an hour, under her direction, he had completed a snow-house large enough for them to lie in.

When he lighted the primus stove Hallam found it needed replenishing, and on picking up the alcohol tin, in which they had brought their supply of coal oil, to his dismay he discovered that it had been leaking, and that there remained only enough for one more filling. There was a little in the lantern that could be saved for cooking by going to bed in darkness. However, as it was only one, or, at the most, two days' journey to the post the loss would not be a great one. With care, the fuel they had would last through.

In the night the sky clouded and it began to rain. By morning, when it was light enough to see, they found that the walls and roof of the igloo were bulging inward,

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momentarily threatening to collapse. Hallam woke Norma and together they managed to drag their beds and the packs outside. As Hallam recovered the last of their belongings the roof caved in and they were left without shelter.

It was plain now that they must hurry at their best speed. The snow was soft and it would be bad traveling. Hallam called to the dogs, which had slept outside in a burrow of their own, but they did not come. He dug them out, to find that all three had become sick of the fatal ailment during the night.

He realized what this meant. Partially disabled himself, he was left with a partially disabled girl in the heart of a barren wilderness of snow, trackless, desolate, God-forsaken. As the realization grew he harked back to the words of Sophia Burton:

“Have you ever been in a situation where your money could not help you and your friends and your influence could not help you,—where it became necessary for you to rely solely upon yourself and your own strength of body and character to pull you through?”

But he wasted no time in retrospect. They had covered barely fifteen miles the day before. The trading-post lay at least double that distance away. That would mean certainly two days of hard travel afoot—perhaps three. He returned to Norma and told her of the dogs. She received the news calmly.

“I more than expected it,” she said, “but we must go on.”

In silence they loaded the sledge, leaving everything that was not necessary to life. They counted out provisions for four days and abandoned the rest, for there was no dog-food to carry now. Finally Hallam came to his musk-ox skins. He hesitated a moment and then tossed the bundle to one side. Norma picked it up and replaced it on the sledge.

“You must keep the thing you came for,” she said, quietly.

They slipped into their snow-shoes and started, Hallam with his shoulders in the traces, Norma walking at his side. The rain fell incessantly, a solid, drenching downpour.

As they went on he noticed that the girl was limping.

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"Are you lame, Norma?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I must have wrenched my ankle, somehow. It is nothing. It will pass off."

But it did not pass. Though she bravely tried not to show it Hallam soon discovered that she was suffering keenly. She denied it and insisted on going on, but as the dreary morning dragged out its hours it became plain that she must rest. Hallam halted and turned on her suddenly, catching the pain that showed in her face unawares. He laid a hand gently on either shoulder and looked her in the eyes.

"Norma," he said, "you must rest. You have been brave as the bravest, but you can't go on."

At the kindness in his voice the girl broke down. For an instant his arms went around her and in sheer weariness she dropped her head on his breast.

Then she straightened herself. "I will ride for a little while," she said. "Perhaps it will ease the pain. Then I will walk again. I would not ride at all, but I know we must not stop."

He helped her to the sledge and seated

her on the soaking robes. Then he put his weight into the traces and they moved on again.

It was killing work. The heavy sledge slewed in the crumbling snow and the runners plowed in the melting drifts. A great thirst assailed him. His mouth grew dry as ashes and he began to catch up handfuls of snow to stop the burning.

After an hour Norma called to him that she was ready to walk again. He allowed her to try, but during the time she had rested, her ankle had swelled to double its normal size and she could not bear her weight upon it. She made a brave effort but failed, and miserably crept back to her seat.

Hallam, refreshed by the short breathing space, now caught his second wind. While before he had grown quickly tired, he now found his strength returning, and settling to his load pushed forward steadily through the falling rain. Hour after hour he tramped, sweating at every pore, wet to the skin, but strong in heart, purposeful, vigorous. In the early afternoon they stopped and ate cold caribou meat. Hallam smoked and they struggled on. Not until the night

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began to fall did he dare to halt again, for he knew that he was growing more tired with each step and he feared the result of relaxation.

When finally the growing darkness demanded their attention he found that the snow was too soft to use for building, and he pitched the tent, water-soaked and leaking. But it was a shelter, and they boiled their kettle and were heartened by a hot meal.

The thick caribou pelts of which the outside coverings of the sleeping-bags were made had shed the rain perfectly, so that they found their beds dry. After wrapping Norma's foot and ankle in a bandage, soaked in coal-oil for want of a better liniment, Hallam left the tent to give her an opportunity to remove her wet outer garments. Returning in the darkness he took off his own and crawling into his bag was almost instantly asleep.

The girl lay wakeful and restless in the discomfort of her aching ankle. Her wounded shoulder had grown stiff and painful. Hallam slept heavily at her side. Lifting the flap of his bag gently she tried to see him, but it was too dark.

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Almost timidly she bent over, and with her hand touched the rough, damp hair on his forehead. Then she leaned down, holding her breath, and for an instant laid her lips lightly above his eyes.

CHAPTER XVII

HALLAM WINS A FIGHT

IN the night the storm cleared and it grew much colder, so that in the morning the rain-soaked clothing that they had hung on the tent-pole was frozen stiff. Hallam rose first, sore and lame from the hard work of yesterday. With the handle of his knife he beat the ice from the garments, and putting them on found them almost dry. Norma, roused by the noise, waited until he had finished. Then she spoke and he stooped over her with grave concern.

She was shocked at his appearance. His face was drawn and there were lines in it that she had not seen before. But he laughed when she mentioned it and lighted the stove for breakfast.

They made an early start, for they wished to cover as much ground as possible before the sun began to melt the snow. Norma's ankle was still swollen and painful. She



THE FIRST MILE WAS THE MOST EXQUISITE TORTURE

Hallam Wins a Fight

insisted on trying to walk, but it made their progress so slow that Hallam rebelled and made her take her place on the sledge again.

For him the first mile was the most exquisite torture. He had thought himself in splendid condition, but the gruelling work of the day before had poisoned him thoroughly with fatigue and every movement was like the rack. But as he walked, grinding his teeth at times with the effort, motion grew less painful and at the end of an hour he was making easier progress.

With the load behind him it was impossible to travel more than two miles an hour and the distance ahead looked immeasurable. The monotony of it, too, was wearing. In every direction, as far as the eye could reach, the plain of snow was unbroken. It was a white desert, vast, illimitable. Not a tree, not a rock nor a bush broke its surface. The bright, scorching sun in the heavens was the only object to be seen.

At the end of each hour they stopped, and Hallam smoked his pipe. Norma, bemoaning her helplessness, blamed herself bitterly for being a burden, but he would not hear of her attempting to walk. He strove

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to keep her entertained, telling her the things she was so eager to hear, touching on the wonders of the world she had never known—commonplace to him, yet bearing a new interest in the telling.

And seeing through her eyes he gained a perspective upon life that he had never before imagined. The familiar matters of which he talked came to be marvels of invention when viewed from the standpoint of one who was an utter stranger.

“You shall see them, Norma,” he told her. “You shall see them all some day. The things I am telling you sound hardly believable, yet they are so. I will prove it to you.”

But the girl’s eyes grew wistful and a little sad.

“I—do not know,” she said.

They went on. It became a struggle with distance. Each hard-won mile counted for so much and no more. Hallam’s imagination failed to grasp more than a mile at a time. He would set his eyes upon a point far distant on the snow, a drift, a depression—anything upon which he could fix his attention. Then he would concentrate upon

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reaching that point. The passage of time seemed endless.

At noon, though their stock of fuel was low, Norma insisted on making tea, and the strong infusion put new life into the weary man. In the late afternoon they saw a herd of caribou moving north across their path. They were less than half a mile distant and going slowly. Norma urged Hallam to stalk and shoot one. It would be a break in the killing monotony of effort, and she felt instinctively that fresh, red meat was worth several meals of the stale food they had been eating.

Taking his rifle he struck off ahead of the herd. He disappeared in a hollow, and soon after, Norma heard a shot, then another, and she saw one of the animals fall.

Hallam came back, his face cheery, and hauled the sledge to his kill with a lighter step. That night they had fresh deer's liver.

Hallam, wearied to the uttermost, slept ill. It seemed to him that he lay in a waking dream, endlessly long, even as the day had been. Half waking, half dozing he traveled the day's journey over and over;

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each slew of the sledge, each gruelling ascent was performed again in a delirium of fatigue.

Norma heard him twisting and turning and muttering in his half-conscious misery and more than once she reached out her hand and laid it on his hot forehead. At one of these times he roused and taking her hand in his own, laid his cheek upon it. She waited, not moving or speaking, and presently she knew that he slept. But she did not take her hand away.

The next day it was the same—bright sun, warm, spring air, enervating in its stillness. Hallam, hollow-eyed, stern, silent, placed himself in harness and they began the march anew.

Norma's ankle was better from its two days of rest and toward noon she left the sledge, lightening Hallam's work immeasurably. They were about to halt when all at once the girl gave a cry, and looking where she pointed Hallam saw a sharp depression away to the right.

"It is a lake," she cried, her eyes gleaming with sudden excitement. "It must be the Long Lake. See, where it stretches off to the south! I am sure of it."

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"Where is the post?" asked Hallam, wearily, scanning the white surface.

"The post is near the southern end."

"And how long is the lake?"

"About ten miles, I have heard my father say. This must be the northernmost reach."

Ten miles! Could he make it? He felt that he must. Norma had spoken once that day of pain in her shoulder and it had troubled him, but he had not dared to disturb the bandage, for he had no others.

Presently they found themselves descending an easy slope to the lake's surface. At the edge they ate a lunch, building a real fire for the first time since they had left the cabin with some willow twigs they found growing on the shore. The cheerful blaze was a comfort to watch, even if its warmth was scarcely needed. In less than an hour they were up and away, Norma riding a part of the time and walking when Hallam would let her.

The snow on the surface was packed and frozen into a hard crust and the sledge slipped along more easily. Yet to Hallam each step was an effort of will, each drag at his burden a fresh torture. Norma saw

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that he was fighting grimly to keep up, and she cheered him as best she could with the picture of a dry, warm house and a bed and a fire as his reward.

But Hallam walked now in a kind of daze, hardly hearing her words. He began to stumble, and once or twice fell heavily. Norma helped him up and mechanically he plodded on. It was growing dark, but he did not notice. The coolness that came with the setting of the sun was grateful, and the girl took his wooden spectacles from his eyes. He would not have thought of doing it himself. She had forsaken the sledge altogether, now, and walked at his side. They no longer needed snow-shoes and she laid them on the load. Anxiously she scanned the length of the lake for a light. At last she saw it, a mere spark glimmering through the dusk.

She gave a cry and Hallam stopped, gazing at her stupidly.

"Don't you see it?" she exclaimed, pointing. "The light! It is the post. We will leave the sledge here."

Hallam grunted something inarticulate and started on, but the girl stopped him and

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threw off the harness that had galled him so long. Taking his hand she led him forward, he stumbling, apparently unawakened to the fact that he no longer dragged his burden.

They staggered on, Hallam constantly mumbling under his breath, only half understanding her words of encouragement. He slipped continually, and more than once the girl saved him from falling at the expense of a cruel wrenching of her injured shoulder. But she kept him moving, and slowly, very slowly the light drew nearer. At last it made a dim pathway across the snow and she led the man into it. He seemed to notice, for he raised his head, muttering, and then began walking faster.

At last the shore was reached and Norma could see the roof of a low building outlined against the sky. They stumbled up the slope. A dog barked. Hallam, swaying on his feet, cursed. The door of the house opened and there stood framed in it a huge figure.

"Who's there?" bellowed a voice.

For answer the man and the woman staggered into the streaming light. Hallam

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wavered for a moment, blinking stupidly. Then, without a word, he reeled and fell face downward in the snow.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRADING-POST

N EARLY twenty-four hours later, when Hallam opened his eyes he was lying in a small cabin of logs, into which the afternoon sun was pouring through a three-pane window. At first he could not remember. Then it came to him that this must be the trading-post. He lay still, with his eyes fixed on the smoky rafters. The last he could recall was the lake, the interminable length of frozen lake, with Norma beside him, he dragging the sledge, she aiding him when he stumbled. How he had finally reached the post he had no idea. The interim was a blank.

He threw off the heavy woolen quilt and sat up. There was a movement beside the bunk and Norma appeared as if from nowhere, her face anxious.

“Ransford!”

“Norma!”

Hallam saw that she was dressed no longer

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in her own garments of young caribou skin but wore a man's woolen shirt, tucked into a pair of heavy short trousers buckled below the knee, woolen socks and her own seal boots. Her hair still hung in its thick braids before her shoulders, but it was rough and sadly tangled. She was smiling, but her face looked thinner and there were shadows beneath her eyes.

"Norma!" he exclaimed, slipping from the edge of the bunk, "how is it with you?"

"I am well," she answered.

"How long have I been sleeping here?"

"Since last night. It is now late afternoon."

"And you?"

"Oh, I have slept, in the bunk, here, beneath you. The factor has given us this cabin while we stay."

"And did he give you those clothes, too?" asked Hallam with a grin.

"Yes," she said, in a matter-of-fact way. "There are some for you," and pointed to the opposite wall.

The cabin was warm, and Hallam looking about saw a stove in one corner with a fire glinting through the cracked door.

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"Has the factor a wife?" he asked.

"I don't know. There is a woman—an Indian woman, very fat and ugly, who cooks for him."

"And your shoulder?" he asked.

"I have not looked at it," replied the girl, "but I wish you would get it well as soon as you can. I hate being one-armed."

Hallam considered.

"I will go and find the factor. What is his name?"

"Stevenson."

He asked her about their arrival and she told him of their leaving the sledge on the lake and of his collapse

"I made them bring you here," she said, "where I could watch you. When you could not speak to me I was afraid, but after I had eaten I slept, and then I waited. I am glad you are well again."

"Good girl," Hallam approved. "My, but I'm hungry. I suppose we couldn't get that sledge tonight? I want it, or rather what is lashed in the bow of it, but the factor must not know. Skins like those were what cost McAvey his job. He'll be on the lookout."

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"Why is that?" asked Norma.

"It's against the law. The skins are barred from trade and it is an offense to be caught with one."

As he spoke he pulled on his moccasins. "I'm going to see the factor. Will you wait here?"

The girl nodded and he went out.

The post consisted of several log buildings, and looking about for the source of timber supply Hallam saw along the edge of the lake a growth of spruce and stunted birch. The sun was setting and he looked up the length of frozen whiteness in search of the black dot on the ice that would be the sledge. Nothing was to be seen. He stepped back to the door.

"How far up the lake is the sledge, Norma?"

"About two miles, I think. I remember that it was around that point you can see jutting out. I have looked. You cannot see the place from here."

Hallam felt relieved, but he resolved to go for the skins that night. He walked across the hard-packed snow of the factor's yard, and pushed open the heavy door, walking in without ceremony.

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The place was like an oven and smelled vilely of many things, principally fat meat, cooking. He saw a huge man in undershirt and trousers seated on a bench before the red-hot stove. His great stomach protruded in a paunch, creased by his waistband, and his shirt above it was stained with smears of tobacco juice. As he heard the door open the man turned and Hallam noted the heavy jowl, with its sparse and tobacco-stained beard crowned with a heavy, greasy mop of sandy, graying hair. His eyes were light blue and watery, and one of them walled outward.

"Huh," grunted the man. "Ye've come to life hae ye?"

"You're Stevenson, the factor? My name is Hallam."

"I'm pleased to meet wi' ye, Meester Hallam. We ha nae had a veesitor for mony a day. How is your gude woman? She's keppit close by ye sence ye came. I know her by her fayther, Norman Leonard, the ould hermit, though I ha' nae set een on him lang syne."

"He's dead," said Hallam, briefly. "I'm taking his daughter out of the country."

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"Dead!" exclaimed Stevenson. "When?"

"Ten days ago."

"And yersel', Meester Hallam?" asked the factor, spitting at the hissing stove, "will ye nae sit doon?"

"Prospecting for an American concern," lied Hallam readily. "Copper and coal."

"Ye dinna tell," mused the factor, "and wi' what luck?"

"Found both," answered Hallam, taking a seat opposite. "I was on my way back when I came across Leonard's camp. He had died that morning and the girl was alone. I stayed and that night my two Indians deserted. They believed the place was haunted."

"Aye," said the huge Scotchman, "I hae heard o' that. It is no canny, I've been told."

"I took the girl and started so we might get out on snow. The dogs got the spring-sickness and died. So here we are. The girl has a hurt shoulder. She will need some attention."

"Weel, weel. That is nae so gude," reflected Stevenson.

"Mr. Stevenson, have you a medical kit with some antiseptics and bandages?"

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"I dinna ken," said the factor, rising. "The company gi'es us mony things we hae little use for."

He went to a chest at one side of the low room and pawed about in it, finally bringing forth a square box with a red cross label.

"Tak' it, Meester Hallam," he said, "I hae ne'er turned the key in the lock these twa year."

"Much obliged to you," said Hallam, rising.

"Bring the lass back wi' ye," said the factor, waving a hand like a ham, "we'll be eatin' soon."

Hallam found Norma sitting before the small, hot stove, her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palms.

"I do not like this place," she said, as he came in.

"No more do I," he replied. "But we have no choice, for the present."

"I do not think I shall like *people* very well," she went on. "I do not like Stevenson, nor the Indian woman. There are two or three Indian men, too. I never liked Indians—except Sandy."

"My dear girl," said Hallam, looking over

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the contents of the medical chest and noting with satisfaction that it contained bichloride tablets, "I like them even less than you, but the world is not made up of Indians. When your shoulder is well we will go."

"How?" she asked, looking at him.

"The way we came, if we can get a dog-team."

"The snow is going," she replied. "In a week there will be no traveling. There is a south wind in the air now. I can feel it."

"How soon will the lakes be open?"

"Perhaps three weeks."

"Then we shall have to wait. It will be nearly that before you are fit to travel."

She said nothing, but he noticed that her lips closed tightly.

There was water boiling on the stove, and filling a basin Hallam dropped a blue tablet in it to dissolve.

"Norma," he said, "will you let me look at your shoulder?"

"Yes," she said, a little wearily.

He loosened her heavy shirt at the neck, stripping it down, and cutting the wrappings away with his knife. What he saw surprised him. The flesh was black and blue as from

a severe bruise, but the skin was healing cleanly, without a sign of suppuration.

To make sure he washed the wounds and bandaged them with fresh gauze. When he had finished she went to her deerskins, thrown in the lower bunk, and brought him her comb.

"Please," she said, shaking back her neglected hair. "You don't know how it feels."

He did better this time, but as before, his nearness to her, the intimacy that his touching of her hair implied, the sweet smell of its masses, cool and silken upon his hands, made him fight to keep from taking her close in his arms.

He recognized a primal passion straining at the leash and it left him trembling, for he also recognized in his companionship with this girl a sacred trust, not to be broken by word or act. By her voluntary choice of this cabin with him rather than quarters with the Indian woman she had placed upon him a responsibility that he could not shirk. He felt that instinctively she distrusted the factor and that she had turned to him, perhaps without knowing why. Circumstances had made him her protector. No greater

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wrong could befall than that he should forfeit that claim upon him.

How far the light that had come to her on the day she had received her injury had penetrated her womanhood he could only surmise, but that what she had seen had developed within her, as yet vague and unrecognized, the instinct of the maternal he could not doubt.

He remembered the night—that white night when he had tossed, tortured with weariness in the igloo—how she had touched his face with her hand, gently, as a mother might have done, and how he had fallen asleep with his cheek pillowed upon her palm. As he looked at her now, he saw in her a child, trembling on the threshold of that knowledge which would make her a woman, unconscious of danger, yet vaguely aware of something that caused her concern, trusting him absolutely, looking to him and to his worldly wisdom to keep her from evil. And as he looked he swore that she should not find him wanting.

As he dropped the lid of the red-cross box she looked up.

“Are you going to do nothing for yourself?” she asked.

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Hallam laughed. "I had pretty nearly forgotten."

"That is not true, Ransford," she contradicted, gravely. "You were waiting, so that I would not see. You have helped me and done your best for me. I must help you."

She looked away for an instant. "I was the cause of it," she said, a little bitterly.

It was the first time she had referred directly to his wound since she had aided him with the first bandage, but he saw now that she had been thinking of it and that it had troubled her. Without protest he took off his coat and rolled his sleeve high. The wrappings had slipped and the dried blood made an ugly sight. She paled a little, but going to the basin she soaked a piece of gauze as she had seen him do, and carefully washed the long cut. It was healing, though not so cleanly as her own. With Hallam smiling at her concern, she wound a clean bandage and when it was done he showed her the marvels of the safety pin—the first she had ever seen. When he had pushed it through and sprung the point into place she looked up with a sweet wistfulness in her eyes that

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he had never seen before. Her hand somehow slid into his.

"What is it, Norma?" he said.

"I—don't know," she whispered.

Her gaze fell, and her head, as she stood close, was bowed a little until it almost touched his breast, and for an instant her dark hair swept his lips. In her slim wrist he felt the throbbing that came from her heart. He was sure she must hear the faster beating of his own.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAN LEARNS

IF Hallam had not made a sauce of his full day of fasting he would have been repulsed by the fare that was spread upon the greasy board of Stevenson. There was fried caribou meat, ill-baked, sour bread, and tea that made him wonder at the inventions of man. As for Norma she did not even pretend to eat. They sat opposite Stevenson, who eyed her between knife-fulls with a glance that seemed to Hallam almost obscene. The Indian woman, whom Stevenson called Myra, served them, shuffling about the room in her moccasined feet, wiping her hands on a smeary apron.

The trader noticed that Norma was not eating.

"Ye're not ower ravenous the nicht, Mistress Leonard," he said, thrusting his head toward her in an elephantine attempt at jocularity. "Maybe the deermeat is an auld story to ye, but we hold oursels in luck to hae it."

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Norma looked at him, but did not answer. Hallam, to divert their host, began to talk of matters in the world outside, but he soon saw that the man was not listening. He evidently knew little and cared less for the events of civilization. When at last the meal was over Stevenson pushed his stool back from the table, yawned and disappeared in an inner room. Hallam caught a silent appeal from Norma's eyes.

"Yes," he nodded, "go if you like." "I'll come as soon as I can."

The girl slipped out and Hallam waited. The trader soon reappeared and settled once again into his place by the fire. The room was like a sweat-box, but the Indian woman brought a basketful of wood and stoked the fire until the dirty-white barrel of the stove glowed red.

"Now, Myra, wumman," called Stevenson, "we'll see if that aboreeginal brain o' yours is more addled than mine the nicht."

The squaw obediently appeared bearing a checkerboard, so worn and so befouled with the pawing of dirty hands that its squares were nearly obliterated. She drew up a stool, and with the board upon their knees

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the pair settled down to an evening of domestic entertainment.

Hallam stayed to watch, and if possible gain an insight into the mental make-up of the trader. The woman, he saw at once, played the game with extraordinary skill, barely hesitating over problems that seemed to Hallam difficult. She won with ease, and Stevenson reached for his pipe, swearing under his breath. Again the woman won and they started a third game. Hallam could see the man's face working and waited for the explosion. Sure enough it came. Myra had pushed into his king-row for a second time when he brought his heavy hand down on the board with a crash that scattered the pieces far and wide.

"Wumman! Ye're no playin' me fair. Ye auld deevil. Awa wi' ye, makin' a mock o' me before strangers. Oot!"

The squaw fled, and Hallam, who had seen no unfair move on her part, recognized in Stevenson's simulated rage a subterfuge against a third and most ignominious defeat. He rose, disgusted.

"Sit ye doon, Meester Hallam, sit ye doon. Maybe I am a bit hasty noo an' then, but ye'll find me none the waur for a' that."

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Hallam pleaded weariness.

"It is rather an imposition, to come down on you like this at a time of year when provisions are running short," he said, "but you can see that we have no choice. I hope you can take care of us until Miss Leonard's shoulder is well and she is fit to travel."

"Ye'll no hae to worry ower that, Meester Hallam. Ther'll be victuals a' plenty such as they are, an' the company bids us be hospeetable."

He waved his hand and sank back into his chair as Hallam closed the door—a great, inert mass of human flesh dulled and brutalized by long isolation.

Outside the moon was shining, and Hallam looked longingly at the lake, blue-white in its radiance. He had meant to slip away before and make an attempt to bring in the sledge, but now that he had pleaded weariness to Stevenson he could not go openly. He knocked softly on the cabin door.

"Ransford?"

He entered, to find Norma stretched upon a bunk. She rose and slipped over the edge, and in the dim light of the single oil lamp he saw that her cheeks were wet with tears.

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She did not try to hide them, but stood like a child before him, frankly showing her troubled face.

Surprised, he went quickly to her, and as he might have done with a child, laid an arm comfortingly about her shoulders.

"What is it, Norma?"

She did not answer and he sat down and drew her beside him. She dropped suddenly to the floor and laying her arm across his knees, buried her face in it and began to sob.

For an instant a hundred thoughts swept through his mind. Had anything happened? This was not like Norma, the strong, self-willed, self-reliant Norma he had known, the haughty, imperious Norma of their first meeting, the Norma who, in her own strong arms, had borne the body of her father to his grave; who had, with the courage of a man, led him into the white desert of the Barren Grounds with only a compass as a guide, and who, like a valkyr, had fought at death grips with him in the snow.

He would not have dared to offer sympathy to that woman. But here was another personality—just a young girl, it seemed to him, her heart overflowing with something that

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was hidden. He felt somehow responsible for it. As she knelt there, like a picture moving on a screen the events of the last few days flashed before him. Her dead father, the loss of whom was the loss of the only friend she had ever known; the loss of her dogs, which he knew was more cruel than she had allowed him to see; the strange awakening of the latent motherhood within her—an awakening that had come prematurely, before even the *woman* had been born. What must have been the doubt, the anguish that had come with it, like a flash of light before eyes that cannot see, or the jarring of thunder upon ears that cannot hear? Now she was in this strange place, forced to sit under the ogling glances of a coarse-grained, brutal animal, the first of the man-tribe she had ever known. She was homeless, alone, heartsick for the want of human love.

Hallam's arm about her shoulders stiffened and he drew her closer to him, his hand stroking her hair. A great tenderness rose in him and his heart swelled with it, spreading through him a warmth that was like nothing he had ever known. He bent over and spoke.

"Norma!—Dear!—Sweetheart!"

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It may have been the tenderness in his voice, it may have been the throb of his heart, or it may have been the touch of his hand, but it brought from the girl a cry that Ransford Hallam never forgot. The love-starved barrenness of her whole life was expressed in it; her motherless childhood, her friendless, lonely youth, her years of solitude in the company of an old, stern man—a recluse, a misanthrope, soured by tragedy or by disappointment, who had had no tenderness in him, and who had reared his child a stoic like himself. It came to Hallam that for the first time in her whole life this girl was feeling the emotion of human sympathy, conveyed from him to her by his hand and his voice and heart. He saw it, he felt it, and gladly he opened the flood gates and let the tide rush through.

Her arm lay about his neck and her face was pressed close to his breast—so close that he could feel her breath warm upon it. He caught her hand in his and kissed it. He caressed the smooth, dark head and laid his lips upon it, and his cheek, talking the while, not as a lover talks, but as a mother might. There was no emotion of sex. It

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was an outpouring of simple tenderness, of gentleness, of pure, great, sympathetic love such as lies latent in all mankind, seldom aroused to such warmth as Hallam had found within him.

After a time she ceased to sob, but she still clung to him as if loath to lose her new-found treasure. The lamp burned dim, sputtered, flared and went out, leaving them in the path of moonlight that poured through the window. How long they sat there Hallam could not have told. It might have been hours. Quietly he talked to her, talked of his own home, of his people, his mother, his childhood; and she listened, asking questions now and then, showing him the wonder that she felt—she who had never known the love of any one.

At last it began to grow cold in the cabin. The fire burned itself out and the chill of the night crept in about them.

“Do you think you could sleep now?” he asked.

She nodded, but he could see that the great loneliness was still upon her.

He spread the quilts smooth and held

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out his hand. She lay down quietly and he covered her. Then he stooped close.

“Good-night, dear,” he said, and she felt upon her lips the first kiss they had ever known.

CHAPTER XX

SIX LITTLE MUSK-OX SKINS

RANSFORD HALLAM was not a dreamer. His interest in life was a day-to-day affair. He had never been forced to look ahead beyond the current diurnal activities of his kind. He had no ambition other than to please himself; consequently life held no serious purpose for him. There had never been any real problems to solve; no real parting of the ways had as yet been reached by the path his career had followed.

But on this night, as he lay in his rough bunk above that of Norma Leonard, something came out of the darkness and smote him between the eyes and forced him for the first time in his life to take stock of the future.

What was to become of Norma Leonard? He had found her. He had taken her from the only home she had ever known, and he was as firmly bound in responsibility for her welfare as if he had been her father.

Six Little Musk Ox-Skins

That his companionship had already compromised her in the eyes of the world, had the world known, he did not for an instant consider. It seemed as natural to be sleeping in the same room with her as to be eating at the same table. But he was about to place her in a far more dangerous position.

When the spring opened and the waterways were released they would leave the Northland. What, then, was to become of this girl of the snows and the Barren Grounds? No native brought from the heart of a savage jungle could be more ignorant of the world and its ways. Unable to read or write, uninitiated into the simplest phases of modern life, unschooled in the very elements of knowledge, of which a child of five would be possessed, this girl stood on the threshold of civilization as utter a stranger as if she had dropped from a solitary existence in the moon. She had no means of support, not even garments in which she could appear before men.

And he, Ransford Hallam, clubman, dilettante, society trifle, was responsible.

For a long time Hallam stared into the dark and thought. He recalled the bar-

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gain he had made with her; that if she aided him in his hunt he was to aid her in her search for the gold reef that her father had spent his life in seeking. She had carried out her part of the agreement. He must be as faithful. 5

But the gold appealed to him neither from a standpoint of adventure nor that of gain. Even if they should succeed, inaccessibility would render it valueless unless its riches should be so extraordinary as to make development feasible. But this possibility was so remote that he scarcely gave it a thought. It was plain to him that she was to be his protégé—an obligation in the name of humanity.

His friends would learn of her—his women friends—Sophia Burton would know of her. What then? Could he expect that the worldly-wise Miss Burton would believe the truth as he should tell it? Could he expect any one to believe it? The more he pondered the more often he came back to the single solution he was able to devise. A convent, the nearest convent to railhead; Norma there to learn what the nuns could teach. But as often as he arrived at this

Six Little Musk-Ox Skins

settlement of his problem he rejected it. He could not imagine Norma Leonard, the girl of the great North, who had grown to womanhood among the four wild winds, who had roamed the barrens and the forest, the lakes and the rivers, as free as the caribou—his mind could not picture her living in the restraint and the sanctity of the Church. She would be like a caged bird, or more likely a caged panther. He had seen them in menageries, and he knew that they were unhappy.

He thought of all the women he knew, and vainly sought for one who might believe, and who would help him, even to the extent of taking the girl under her own tutorship. He could not find one.

Naturally his thoughts harked back finally to Sophia Burton, not because there was in his heart that real feeling of devotion that a lover should have, but because she had become a habit with him. From her it was an easy step to the challenge that had brought him into this perplexing situation. He remembered the six skins that he had taken, warm from the six little shapes that lay so redly upon the snow. He had

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got them! He had proven himself. He hesitated. What had he proven—that he was a man, or merely a butcher? Still they were his, and he would carry them to the girl who had sent him for them.

And this brought him again to the present. The skins were on the sledge, in hourly danger of discovery by the first Indian who might pass up the lake. He must bring them in and hide them until he was ready to leave. Even as he turned the matter over in his mind, he decided that no time could be better than the present. With the post asleep he could slip out unseen and fetch the pelts before daylight.

To decide was to act, and Hallam cautiously sat up and listened. Norma was asleep, breathing regularly and quietly. He slipped to the floor and found his moccasins and coat. As he reached the door his feet struck a stool and it fell over with a thump. Norma was instantly awake. She leaned from her bed and saw him, standing in the path of moonlight.

“Ransford, what is it?”

“I was worried about the skins, Norma, and I’ve made up my mind to fetch them.”

Six Little Musk-Ox Skins

The girl rose from her bunk and slipped into her moccasins.

"It is a good plan," she said. "I will go with you."

He tried to dissuade her, but she was firm. He could not find the sledge in the darkness, she argued, for the moon was about to set. She was so insistent that Hallam, surmising that she disliked being left alone, finally consented, and after listening at the door for some moments they slipped out into the night together.

The moon, nearly full and swinging low in the west, showered the world with silver light. The air was soft, with a south wind stirring, and though the snow was frozen hard, there was not frost enough to make their footsteps creak.

Silently the man and the girl crept down the bank to the lake and headed north for the long black point. After half an hour of brisk walking they reached it and made out what they sought, a black dot less than half a mile distant.

The skins were as they had left them, frozen iron-hard. Hallam flung them to his shoulder.

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"We will leave the sledge," he said, "and come for it openly in the daytime, as if we had nothing to hide."

By the time they started back the moon had dipped below the ridge and was gone. As they approached the post, Hallam stopped, listening for any sound of man or beast, but there was none and they climbed the slope cautiously in silence. When they reached their cabin they had seen or heard no one. The skins were safe.

Hallam hid them under the boughs of his bunk, and presently both man and girl slept again.

When they awoke it was daylight and a gentle rain was pattering on the roof. They sought breakfast in the factor's camp and found Stevenson, heavy-eyed and stupid, already at table. There was caribou meat again, and coffee of sorts. Hallam, hungry after his night exercise, ate heartily and he was glad to see Norma's appetite returning. When the meal was over Norma helped the Indian woman with the dishes, while the men smoked.

"The winter is breaking, Meester Hallam," said Stevenson, nodding at the rain outside.

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"It's a south wind, and the travelin' is over, I'm thinkin'."

"That reminds me," said Hallam, "our sledge is on the lake, with our rifles and our duffle. I'll have to fetch it."

"Your sledge?" inquired Stevenson.

"After the dogs gave out I hauled it to within about two miles. It lies around the long point."

"Weel, aweel! Ye'll no hae to fetch it for yoursel', Meester Hallam. There's Injuns here, that do naething but eat my victuals."

"Very well," said Hallam, "I will be obliged to you."

"Myra," called Stevenson, "tell the two lazy varmints that call theirsels your brithers to gang oot to the lang point an' fetch a sledge they'll find there."

The men departed, and while Hallam waited he pretended to read a torn, paper-covered novel that he discovered lying in the dust over a cupboard. But he watched the factor, who sat by the stove, smoking and glancing covertly from time to time at Norma as she came and went, busying herself at tidying the room. Hallam did not like the look in the pale blue eyes. He had

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seen it before, in the restaurants of Broadway, in the boulevards of Paris, in Piccadilly Circus, and he knew it for the look of the wolf. He saw that the Indian woman had noticed it, too, and he resolved that Norma should never be left alone.

From time to time Stevenson rose heavily and entered a back room, returning after a few moments to resume his pipe. He became more talkative and asked Hallam many questions about the big Canadian cities that he had not seen for three years. This loosening of the factor's tongue Hallam soon began to connect with the visits to the back room. After one of his excursions he passed close to him. As he had suspected, he caught the odor of alcohol. The man was a drinker—a solitary drinker.

The two Indians came toiling from the lake dragging the sledge, and Hallam and the factor went out to meet them. The soaked sleeping-bags were hung in a shed to dry, while Norma took charge of the other belongings except the two rusting rifles, which Hallam brought in and cleaned in the main camp. While he was at work the squaw came to the door and beckoned to

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Stevenson. He went out and Hallam could hear him at the rear door in guttural conversation with one of the Indians in the man's native tongue.

Returning, the factor announced that the men had seen a herd of caribou crossing the lake, and that if Hallam and Norma wanted diversion the fresh meat would be acceptable.

Hallam, who could scarcely refuse to hunt for the post where he was a self-invited guest, promptly accepted the hint and went to find Norma. The girl, glad of anything that would take her away, was ready in a moment. The drizzle had ceased and the sun was beginning to shine through the breaking clouds.

"The men will bring in your game wi' the dogs," called Stevenson as they left.

They caught the last of a large herd of deer going over the long ridge on the west shore and each brought down two.

As they turned toward the post again, Hallam said:

"Norma, what do you think of our host, Stevenson?"

"I do not like him," the girl answered quickly. "I do not like this place at all."

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"Well," he replied, "I don't blame you. I don't like Stevenson, and I don't trust him. Watch him, Norma. Never be alone with him. I will try never to leave you, but you must be on your guard."

"Why?" asked the girl, her straight brows drawing together.

"He drinks," Hallam told her, and then suspecting that she would not know what he meant, added, "he drinks stuff called alcohol, and when he gets too much it may make him quarrelsome, and—well, perhaps dangerous."

"Are *you* afraid?" she asked, looking at him quickly.

"Not for myself. I have had experience with such men. I know about what they will do, but you do not. You must be watchful. If he should ever touch you, call for me. If I should not be near——"

"Well?" asked the girl coolly.

As Hallam spoke he unslung the heavy automatic he wore beneath his coat and buckled it about Norma's waist, out of sight.

They walked on for a time in silence. Hallam could see that the girl was thinking hard. Finally she spoke.

Six Little Musk-Ox Skins

"Ransford, has this anything to do with my being a woman?"

"It has everything to do with your being a woman."

"Do women in the cities go about armed?"

"No, there are laws that are supposed to protect them and officers of the law."

"Otherwise they would not be safe."

"Perhaps not. They are not always safe as it is."

"I think it must be very hard, this being a woman," she said, thoughtfully.

When they reached the post they went directly to their own cabin. As they entered Norma stooped and picked from the floor a sprig of spruce.

The girl looked at Hallam.

"I swept the floor just before we left," she said.

In an instant Hallam had stepped to his bunk and pulled aside the boughs of the balsam mattress. The bundle of baby musk-ox skins was gone.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SOLITARY

“**I**T was a trick,” exclaimed Norma, speaking first.
“A trick?”

“The caribou hunt. Stevenson suspected. He sent us away and then searched.”

“How could he have suspected?” Hallam queried, half to himself, “no one saw us go.”

“The Indians must have seen our tracks,” said Norma.

“But we left no tracks. The snow was frozen. Neither of us broke through once.”

“Perhaps not,” she returned, wiser in Northland lore, “but our weight packed the snow a little. When the rain came the tracks would show.”

Hallam paced up and down the little cabin. There had been a time when he would have abandoned the skins with hardly a thought, merely for the sake of the better speed of a lighter load, but that necessity had passed, and to have them taken from him in this

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sneaking fashion angered him. At once their value to him rose many fold. They were the fruit of his labor, of the hardship he had undergone; they were his proof that he had accomplished something, not much, perhaps, but still the thing he had set himself to do. Suddenly it occurred to him that his task was not yet done. It was one thing to shoot musk-ox and evidently quite another to bring home the trophies of the hunt. He was still under the test. He must still make good.

"Confiscated!" broke from him. "But I won't have it. I want those skins. I've got to have them. I *will* have them!"

The girl had been watching his face sharply, her own shadowed with perplexity.

"Why do you want them so much, Ransford?" she asked, finally.

Hallam halted in his stride. The question displeased him. Instinctively he did not wish to tell Norma of Sophia Burton.

"I don't think you would quite understand, Norma," he said, more quietly. "A certain person with whom I had an argument accused me of always failing under difficulties. It annoyed me, for I knew that

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it was true, so I told the person that I would go into the North and bring back these skins. I must do what I promised, you see. It is a test. I cannot fail now."

"Ransford, was the person a woman?"

Hallam started. He had not expected so keen a question. How had she guessed?

"What makes you think that, Norma?"

"I cannot imagine a man wanting such things, so it must be a woman."

"Well, it is a woman."

"And," questioned the girl, her eyes still straight in his, "did she know how you would have to get them?"

"Yes."

For a time she stood looking at him, saying nothing, then her gaze dropped and she turned away.

Hallam stood staring at the disordered bunk. Suddenly he wheeled and was gone, leaving the door open behind him. He walked straight to the factor's door and went in. The squaw, Myra, was sweeping up the space about the stove.

"Where's Stevenson?"

The question was bitten off short and Hallam's jaw shut tight.

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The woman looked up, her eyes moving slowly to his face.

"Steven' seeck," she said finally.

"The devil he is! He was well enough two hours ago. Where is he?"

"He seeck," repeated the squaw, stolidly.

"Well, I want to see him."

"No see him. Seeck. Lay down."

Exasperated, Hallam's eye fell on the door at the rear, through which he had so often seen the factor disappear. He started for it. Before he had moved two steps the squaw blocked his passage.

"Get out of the way," he growled roughly. "Stevenson's in there. I'm going to see him."

The woman set her back against the door.

"No see Steven'. Seeck," she doggedly repeated.

Hallam was about to force her aside when he heard the lock click and saw Myra swiftly withdraw the key and drop it into her capacious bosom.

He felt that it was no use. He might break the door with an axe, but that would bring the Indians, and no one could tell what might happen. Besides, he had Norma to

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think of. His hands were tied. He shuddered to think of her fate should anything disable him.

The squaw stood resolutely before the door of her master, watching Hallam with narrow, beady eyes.

"How long will he be sick?" Hallam asked, instantly thinking how foolish his question sounded.

"Three day, maybe four," was the prompt reply.

A light dawned. Stevenson was drunk. It had been coming on for a day or two. He was a periodical, and the woman knew how long it was likely to last. Inadvertently she had given him the truth. He turned away. As he opened the outer door he found himself face to face with Norma. She was standing close, as if listening, and he saw her hand slip quickly from beneath her coat where he had buckled the automatic.

Hallam stood a moment looking down at her and watching the color rise red in her cheeks.

"Thank you, Norma," he said quietly. "What made you think of that?"

"I don't know. You looked so—so."

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Hallam laughed. "Anyhow I'm much obliged," he said. "It's good to feel that one has a pal."

"Where is Stevenson?" she inquired, as they walked back.

"The squaw says he's sick. I believe he's drunk. I've been watching it coming on. He may be playing 'possum to avoid meeting me, but I've heard that many of these outpost factors are solitary drunkards—and with their stringent rules against liquor, too!"

For four days they saw nothing of Stevenson. Inquiries were in vain. Hallam could elicit nothing from Myra but the monotonous assurance: "He seeck."

After the rain the weather had turned warm, and the snow was going fast. On the south slope of the ridge across the lake brown patches appeared, and one morning a flock of crows flew over, screaming loudly. At night it froze lightly, but the warm sun quickly dissipated the frost and resumed anew its advancement of spring.

Time hung heavy on Hallam's hands until he found a box of paper-covered novels on a shelf. They were an ill-favored collection, but he devoured them, one after another.

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One, Ivanhoe, he saved for the last, and as he threw himself into his bunk to begin it he noticed Norma eyeing the book wistfully.

He had entirely forgotten that she could not read.

"Norma, I'll read this to you if you'd like."

When he saw the delight that shone in her face he reproached himself for not thinking of it before. He wondered how much she would fail to understand, and told her that she must interrupt whenever she was puzzled.

But she did not interrupt, and until his unpracticed voice grew husky she sat listening, wonder in her eyes at this new world that had been suddenly opened to her.

"It's wonderful," she sighed, as he laid the book down. "Could I ever learn, just a little?"

"Of course you could," he told her, wondering why he had never thought of this, too. "I'll teach you. We'll begin now, if you like."

Though Ivanhoe is hardly a primer, Hallam made it serve fairly well, and after she had learned the alphabet he had her piece together simple words and then point them out in the

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text. It became to her the most fascinating of occupations and for hours together she would sit, brows knitted, working away with the stub of a pencil he had found for her, absorbed, eager and determined.

On the fifth day Hallam, passing the door of the house on his way to the lake for a pail of fresh water, caught a glimpse of the factor inside. He stopped and went in. The man was sitting as usual by the stove, drinking tea from a bowl.

"Glad to see you about again," was Hallam's greeting. "Sorry, you were laid up. Nothing serious, I hope."

The factor merely grunted. Hallam saw that his heavy face was pastily pale and that his hand shook painfully, slopping the hot tea on the floor. His eyes were bloodshot and bulging, and his lower lip hung slack. There could be no doubt of the cause.

Hallam stood for a moment looking down at him.

"Well," Stevenson snarled without looking up, "what do ye stand there for?"

"Stevenson," said Hallam quietly, "I want those skins."

The factor started and the bowl dropped

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from his hand. He cursed and stood up, shakily. Then he sat down again, the sweat standing out in drops on his forehead.

"Ye no can hae 'em," he snapped, his voice cracking and quavering.

"They're mine," said Hallam, still calmly. "I've traveled over a thousand miles for them, and they're mine."

"They're confesstate under-r the law," snarled Stevenson, "an ye'll no hae them."

"You are not the law."

"I *am* the law, and ye're a lawbreaker. I put ye under-r arrest, ye poacher."

Hallam smiled, for the threat seemed empty.

"Ye are under-r arrest," went on Stevenson, "an' the Mounted 'll escort ye out of here when the ice breaks."

Hallam saw it was of no use to argue with a whiskey-sick man on the ragged edge of delirium tremens.

"We'll talk again when you are—better," he said, and left the house.

The next day he saw the six little pelts stretched on frames in the sun, with one of the Indians close by, watching them—and him. The next day they were there, and the next. Then they appeared no more.

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Hallam and Norma were allowed the run of the post, but if they left its confines one or the other of the Indians silently followed them, his rifle in the hollow of his arm. Hallam's own rifle, and Norma's hung on a pair of caribou horns in the factor's house, but they did not attempt to remove them.

Once over his debauch the factor drank nothing. His moroseness disappeared and he became roughly sociable. Hallam, however, avoided him, spending his time in his own camp with Norma, who was deep now in the mysteries of her mother-tongue, and making rapid progress.

At the end of a week the ground was bare, save for a hard-packed drift here and there under the shade of a ledge or on the northerly slopes. The ice of the lake, shot through by sun and wind, was blackening in patches, and water was visible about the shores. Several birch canoes, which had been stored during the winter, were brought out, pitched and overhauled, in readiness for the impending break-up. Birds were appearing and already the grass close under the house-walls was beginning to turn green. Spring was at last at hand.

Norma's wounded shoulder healed rapidly

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with no sign of infection, and Hallam's scratched arm gave him no trouble.

As the black patches grew on the lake and the weakening ice gave signs of an early break-up, Hallam's thoughts began to dwell constantly on the means for getting away. That Stevenson actually intended to hold him until a member of the Northwest Mounted Police could come to take him out under arrest as a poacher he could hardly believe, yet it was possible and worthy of being discounted in his calculations.

With the whole country overflowing with water from the melted snows the only mode of travel was by canoe. Hallam considered that he and Norma might steal away in one of the half dozen crafts now on the lake shore, but that would mean pursuit and a hard chase, and also would entail the abandonment of his musk-ox skins. These Hallam was determined to have. He surmised that they were stored with the company's stock of fur in the loft over the post "store" which adjoined the factor's house. But the Indians used the lower floor as their sleeping quarters, and there was little or no chance of gaining an entrance at night. In the daytime any

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approach to the building was sure to be observed.

For several days freezing weather delayed the break-up, but then came a southerly wind with hot sun, and one day, as Hallam and Norma were hard at their daily lesson, they heard a shout that brought them to the door.

Where before had been a stretch of treacherous, mottled surface there was now blue water. The ice, as if by the magic touch of some unseen hand, had disappeared. In the coves sheets of it still lay, but the main reaches of the lake were clear.

The Indians were already launching a canoe. Hallam turned to Norma. The girl's eyes were upon the water. She said nothing, but in her face he could read her longing to leave this place, where always she was under the eyes of a repulsive brute whom she feared, vaguely, without understanding why.

"You want to go, Norma?"

"Yes, Ransford."

He saw that they must. To stay longer was impossible. Skins or no skins, he could not allow this girl to gain her first introduction to his world through the bars of a jail window,

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or from the crime-laden atmosphere of a magistrate's court.

As he looked at her, wistfully gazing at the open lake, he made an oath under his breath that whatever the sacrifice, she and her welfare should be his first care and responsibility.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FACTOR MAKES AN OFFER

HALLAM stood alone in front of the factor's house, watching Stevenson's plodding bulk as he came up the path. At the door the man halted and Hallam faced him squarely.

"Stevenson," he began, "the lake is open. I want to be on my way. But I want my skins. They are my property. They will not be sold. No one shall suspect you. Name your price."

He saw the Scotchman hesitate.

"I will give you," he said slowly, fixing the factor with steady eyes, "one thousand dollars for those skins."

Stevenson visibly wavered. A thousand dollars was more money than he had ever possessed at one time in his entire life.

"One thousand dollars," repeated Hallam.

The factor dropped his gaze to the toe of his shoe-pack and reflected. After a moment

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he raised his head, leering cunningly at his tempter.

"Aweel," he said, "that's a muckle o' siller. But a mon's conscience, maybe, is o' mair consequence. Hae ye the mony wi' ye, Meester Hallam?"

Hallam smiled at the thought of conscience in this man.

"Of course not," he replied, "but it's easy enough. The name of my House is known wherever there are banks. You will only have to send some one you trust to railhead with me. If I fail to make good there are the skins as evidence, and a warrant should be an easy matter."

Stevenson's face soured.

"What do ye tak me for, young mon? An eediot? So e'en ye did mak your worrd gude and pay the siller, would I be sic a fule as to trust a mongrel Dog Rib wi' it? Na, na, ye maun think o' some simpler way?"

"Well, there's one simpler way."

"I'm listenin' to ye."

"Go out yourself."

"Na," replied Stevenson, shortly. "I canna. It is no my year."

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Hallam's thoughts ran swiftly. His resources were narrowing.

"Stevenson," he said, "listen to reason. Suppose you send me out under guard as a poacher. What proof have you got that I took those skins?"

"The skins," answered the factor shortly.

"And your word and that of these Indians, whom you admit are not trustworthy, against mine. After all, what have you to gain? What have you against me?"

"Naething, Meester Hallam, but a sense o' duty well pairformed," mouthed the factor smugly. "There's ane factor deescharged by the Company for this verra thing. I'll no be wishin' to follow him. I hae nae wish to hear Angus McAvey laughin'."

"Angus McAvey'll not be laughing, Stevenson."

"No?"

"Angus McAvey's dead."

"Mon, ye dinna mean it! When?"

"I saw him buried from his hotel at railhead the day before I came north. He was shot behind his own bar by a half-breed. In was old man Leonard's half-breed, Sandy. McAvey killed him, too. They drew together."

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"Norman Leonard's Sandy!" marveled Stevenson. "At railhead! What was Sandy doin' at railhead?"

"Killing McAvey, apparently," replied Hallam. "At least that was the first and only thing he did during his brief sojourn."

Stevenson seemed about to say something, but checked himself and looked away.

"Aweel," he said at length. "Angus McAvey was a verra violent mon. His end was like him."

The factor's voice trailed off, and again he seemed to reflect. Finally he glanced over his shoulder as if to make sure no one was within earshot, and turning laid a hand on Hallam's shoulder.

"Meester Hallam," he said, "I hae no wish to be harrrd on ye, though a mon maun be faithfu' to his trust. I'll no detain ye. Ye are free to gang as ye like, an tak' the bit pelties wi' ye, but," he added, shoving his heavy face close to Hallam's and speaking in a low growl, "ye agree to gang alane."

For an instant Hallam failed to grasp his meaning. Then his face flamed and he stepped back.

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"Do you mean that you would keep Miss Leonard here?"

"Aweel," Stevenson muttered, "ye hae naething else to offer."

Hallam's fist with his body-weight behind it struck the factor full on the jaw and the man went down like a polled ox. Dazed, shaking his head from side to side, he slowly got to his knees and then stood swaying on his feet, spitting forth a stream of foulness and profanity.

Hallam, his first fierce rage cooled to the temper of steel, stood watching. Suddenly, with surprising quickness, the factor's big arm shot out. Hallam sidestepped with the agility of youth, and his knuckles smashed into Stevenson's face. The man staggered, blinded by the blow, then dropped his hands. His right slid behind him and there was the flash of a knife. Hallam struck again, a clean right-hand blow to the chin, and for a second time Stevenson went down. The knife flew from his hand and he lay there, a huge bulk of unconsciousness in the tender, sprouting grass.

As Hallam stooped to pick up the knife he heard a step. He seized it and turned, pre-

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pared for anything. But it was Norma. Her eyes were wide with anxiety, and in her right hand gleamed the blued steel of the automatic.

Hallam heard a movement within the house.

"Put that up, Norma," he said quickly, and turned to face the Indian woman who came running.

"Your lord and master has been arguing with me," he said to her, "he may need you presently.

The woman bent over the fallen man, casting at Hallam a look of hate, and at the same time one of admiration. She could not altogether refuse to acknowledge one whose fist was weightier than that of Factor Stevenson.

Hallam touched Norma on the sleeve and they started toward their cabin. Suddenly he halted, turned, and disappeared through the door of Stevenson's house. In an instant he was back with the two rifles that had hung on the wall and the cartridge belts that dangled from them.

"Take these and hide them, Norma," he whispered.

The girl was gone in a flash and Hallam

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walked back to where the squaw was endeavoring to rouse Stevenson.

"Get some water," he ordered.

She brought it in a pail and Hallam liberally soused the prostrate man's head. He opened his eyes, blinked, snorted and sat up. One eye was rapidly closing and his lips were cut. He saw Hallam.

"Damn you," he swore, "I'll have the blood o' ye, you an' yours!"

He caught sight of Myra and his utterance was choked as if a hand had grasped his throat. The squaw looked rapidly from one to the other of the two men and began to talk to the factor in her own tongue. He struggled to his feet, shaking off her clutching fingers, and raising his hand struck her cruelly across the mouth.

"Be still, you red limb o' hell," he snarled, and swaying, lurched past Hallam into the house. Hallam saw him enter the rear room and heard the door slam before he turned away.

As he reached the cabin he saw Norma watching from the door. A wild thought seized him. The Indians were on the lake. He had the rifles. Why not make a dash,

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recover the skins and make a get-away; but instinctively following the girl's gaze he saw that the Indians were already landing and running up the bank. Both had rifles in their hands. Myra stood calling to them. The chance, if it had been a chance, was gone.

"Have you hidden the rifles?" he asked.

"Yes, in a dead birch behind the camp."

"Good, but we'll have to find a better place than that. Whatever you do, never be without the gun you wear. It's war, from now on."

"Tell me, what was it? Why did you strike him?"

"It was an insult. You wouldn't understand. It was something that no man could listen to."

The girl searched his face keenly, but she asked no more questions.

Stevenson did not appear again that day, but each time Hallam left his cabin one or both of the Indians stood waiting, armed, and followed wherever he went. Hallam paid not the slightest attention, but walked about the post as usual, chopping and carrying wood for the stove and fetching water.

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But when he was away from the cabin he noticed that Norma was always standing in the doorway, watching.

In the late afternoon they saw a canoe coming down the lake. There were three Indians in it, two men and a squaw, bringing the furs of their winter's trapping. As they landed, Hallam saw them in grave conference with the post natives and knew from the pointings and head-shakings that without doubt his guard was being doubled. The chance of making a dash for liberty was being cut in half.

CHAPTER XXIII

GONE!

DURING the next forenoon two more canoes and six Indians arrived, so that the redmen's colony began to assume considerable proportions. They pitched their deerskin tepees on the shore, and lay in the sun and smoked, apparently in no hurry to do their trading or to leave the sociability of the post.

Hallam, awake now to every possibility of escape, thought of bribery. There surely must be one who would allow his greed to overcome the policy of obedience to the company which insured to him a livelihood. But here again Hallam encountered what to him was the strangest of limitations, the lack of money or any other thing of value. Promises, he knew, were so many empty words.

During the day it became apparent that Stevenson was drinking. He avoided Hallam as if he were a thing of evil, but the

factor's beef-red face and his thickened utterance, betrayed him.

Hallam spoke of it to Norma.

"I wonder where he keeps his liquor," he said. "If we could only locate it and steal enough to befuddle some of these aborigines we might make a get-away with a fair start before we are discovered. At any rate I can think of nothing else."

In vain Hallam watched the factor's house in the hope that some time during the day it would be left unguarded long enough to allow him to reconnoiter, but either Stevenson or the squaw, Myra, was constantly about.

"There's no chance," he said. "We're too well watched."

Towards night it became evident that the Indians were getting ready for some sort of festivity. A quantity of fire-wood was being carried to the shore and a freshly killed caribou was being prepared for roasting. Another canoe bearing three squaws had come down the lake in the afternoon, and the women were engaged in preparations for the feast.

As Hallam and Norma stood near their cabin, watching the fire grow brighter as

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the shadows fell, one of the post Indians came to them and conveyed the information that they were expected to attend the ceremonies. Hallam saw in this much more than a polite attention. Stevenson, knowing that they must be guarded, had chosen to have them where they could be well watched during the confusion that would come with the eating and dancing.

But Hallam was not loath to accept the command, both for himself and Norma. The dance would be a novelty and an evening's entertainment—a moment of cheerfulness in the dreariness of their predicament.

The entire post assembled at dusk in the glare of the fire, about which the squaws were roasting the haunches and saddles of deer meat. Stevenson, in an erectness of semi-alcoholic dignity, sat apart on the bottom of an upturned barrel, waiting for the dancing to begin. Before long two young Indians stepped into the circle of firelight, bowed to the factor as honorary master of ceremonies and began a slow, rhythmic stepping about the heap of blazing logs to the accompaniment of a dirge-like chant. As they passed the group on the far side of the

fire, two other Indians fell in behind and the chant continued. The fifth time around all ten of the Indian men were in the circle.

The squaws, unable to leave the cooking meat, squatted on the ground and helped in the chant, which now began to quicken and grow louder. The men moved faster, beating each foot twice on the ground at every step, bending and straightening their arms in rhythm, twisting their bodies into ungainly attitudes, grimacing and raising their voices to a howl.

The dance had continued but a short time when the squaws broke in with the announcement that the roasts were done. Without ceremony the dancers ceased to step and howl and made a rush for the scorching venison, which they tore into chunks with their hands and fell upon like hungry dogs.

Hallam and Norma, being offered a share, accepted it, but as the meat inside was nearly as raw as when it was killed they could make no more than a pretence of eating. The liver, as the tid-bit of the feast, was cooked on a spit by Myra and delivered to Stevenson as the guest of honor.

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The dogs, of which the Indians had brought nearly a score, sat just outside the circle, eyeing the feast hungrily and fighting like demons whenever a cleanly-picked bone was tossed in their direction. Hallam marveled at the men's capacity. The huge, half-raw lumps of meat disappeared with amazing quickness. The idea seemed to be that extent and speed of deglutition were most desirable in their code of table etiquette, and that he who devoured the greatest amount in the shortest possible time was possessed of the most polished company manners.

In the middle of the meal Stevenson disappeared, but within a few minutes returned to his place, though he ate no more.

When the meat was gone and everybody was gorged to distention, a big, dark-faced Indian, who seemed to have some authority among them, began a song, evidently of thanksgiving. He chanted wearisomely for some minutes and then the others took up a sort of refrain, weirdly savage in its shrill harshness.

Hallam watched the factor, who had just made a second surreptitious excursion. His

face was fire-red, his eyes watery and his breath came in stertorous wheezings. Hallam saw that he was rapidly becoming grossly drunken, and the thought came to him that if he should persist until he reached the stage of stupefaction, there might be in some way an opportunity of reaching his liquor supply. But the man had a Scotchman's hard head. It might be hours before he drank himself into a sodden sleep.

The dance was about to begin again. Hallam glanced at Norma, standing just behind him in the shadow. Her eyes, too, were fixed on Stevenson. The squaws now joined the men. Fresh wood sent the flames leaping high, the dogs chorused their howlings and yelpings with those of the dancers, and the real entertainment of the night began. Hallam, interested in the strange spectacle, became absorbed in watching the antics of a young Indian and a young squaw, who seemed to be carrying on something of a flirtation. He turned to call Norma's attention to the pair and found her gone.

Wondering, he became aware that Stevenson also was not in his place. Vaguely disturbed at the coincidence, he determined

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to follow. He drew back farther into the shadow, intending to slip away, when he saw Myra, who was dancing with the rest, dart a swift look at him as she passed. As she turned and footed it on the other side of the fire he saw her glance at Stevenson's empty barrel. A look of anger came to her eyes, and in an instant she dropped from her place and disappeared in the darkness.

Remembering the woman's looks and her actions on the day before when she came to the factor's aid, Hallam suddenly realized that the squaw was consumed with jealousy. How her instinct had told her of Stevenson's vile plan to detain Norma, Hallam could not imagine, but that she had scented such a plot he had no doubt. Her reign as mistress of the factor's house she believed was at stake, and she would go to any length to frustrate such an attempt upon her position. Fully aroused to the possible danger in which Norma might stand, he backed deeper into the shadows and was about to make a break in the direction of the house when Stevenson, swaying drunkenly, came out of the darkness and stumbled to his seat. Almost at the same instant Myra reappeared across

the circle, her eyes seeking Hallam. Instantly he moved back into the lighted area.

"Myra!" roared the factor. "Where are ye, wumman?"

The squaw crossed to him.

"Oh, there y' are, limb o' hell. Wheresh the key to my room, wumman? Ish losht. Go fin' it. Lock th' door. Bring key here. Unnershtan'? Bring it here."

As Stevenson spoke, Hallam heard a light step and looking up saw Norma. A feeling of great relief came to him. He had been more anxious at her absence than he knew.

"Can't we go?" the girl asked. "It seems as if that howling would ring in my ears forever."

"Not yet," Hallam whispered, "Myra noticed your absence. She has been watching."

The squaw, casting a glance backward at them, departed, and they turned again to watch the monotonous, endless circling of the ring of human figures.

For hours, it seemed, the dance continued. Myra, returning with the missing key, did not again join the others, but squatted at

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Stevenson's feet, waiting for his first snore, when she promptly rose and dragged him off to bed. Finally the dancers grew weary. One by one they dropped out from sheer exhaustion, and at last, when the pile of logs was no more than a bed of redly glowing coals, the last young man fell limply in the worn path his feet had trod, and the feast was over.

It was well after dawn when Hallam and Norma were awakened by the sound of oaths and blows.

Running to the door Hallam looked out and saw Stevenson beating the squaw brutally with a brass cleaning-rod. Between blows he cursed her.

"You will steal my whuskey for your ane black flesh an' blud, will ye? Take that one, noo, an' that. Damn ye for a lyin' squaw wumman. Not twa gill left in the barrel, an' the spigot standin' wide open. Waste as weel as stealin'! Gude liquor, ye thief, wasted like water an' the cellar reekin' fit to drive a mon mad!"

The beating was renewed until the squaw, tortured beyond all bearing, suddenly caught the factor by the ankle, tripped him and

ran as fast as her bulk would allow toward the tepees on the shore.

Norma, who had joined Hallam at the door, stood staring after her.

"What was he beating her for?" asked the girl as the factor, still mouthing oaths, lurched back into his house.

"Some one has stolen his whiskey," replied Hallam, "and they left the spigot running so that what wasn't taken ran out. He's pretty close to a madman, now. I expect he needs a pick-me-up pretty badly this morning."

Stevenson was indeed in a pitiable condition. A periodic drinker, cut off from his whiskey supply at the beginning of a debauch, he was as nearly a lunatic as might be, but he had sense enough to know that if the liquor had been stolen it had been drunk by this time, and he did not attempt to search for it. Myra's attempts to pacify him were in vain. Each time she tried to approach him he drove her from the house with curses. Finally a sullen gloom took the place of violence, and, locked in his room, probably recklessly consuming what dregs were left in the barrel, he was seen no more that day.

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The Indians, after their strenuous night, lay in the sun, loafing and smoking. Hallam moved freely about among them, seeking to ingratiate himself in the forlorn hope of finding one who could be bribed to part with a canoe in return for his rifle—the only thing he possessed of the least value to an Indian. But he found no opening. The men had been warned.

For the first time in his life Ransford Hallam was in that particular situation which Sophia Burton had imagined—a tight place, where all his wealth and influence were discounted to the zero mark. He realized it, and recognized that here was the real test. Was he to allow circumstances to overwhelm him, rule him, cause him to sit down and wait, or was he to rise above them and force an opening—take the fighting chance?

He felt singularly helpless and inadequate, like a man who essays a game, the rules of which he does not understand. Had he been alone he would have felt freer to take chances, but now any overt act on his part would most certainly result in his close confinement, leaving Norma at the absolute mercy of Stevenson.

The young Indian and the girl whom he had noticed during the dance were continuing their flirtation. They sat apart from the others, talking and laughing until they noticed that Hallam's attention was fixed on them, when they ran one of the smaller canoes into the water and set off across the lake. He had considered them as more nearly possible of approach than any of the others, and now that he had unwittingly aroused their prejudice his heart sank as if the last hope were gone.

In the course of an hour, when they returned, Hallam noticed that they landed at a considerable distance down the shore, leaving the canoe out of sight behind a clump of willows, ready, perhaps, for some clandestine excursion later on. He marked that the spot could not be seen from the factor's house nor from any of the tepees, and hope rose again. If he and Norma could reach the canoe unobserved, they might launch it and be away down the lake before their absence was discovered. It was a more or less desperate undertaking, for they would have no provisions, but they would have their rifles, both for defense and

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for game, and with them they might live if pursuit were not too determined.

He went to tell Norma of his plan, but found her heating water for a bath and was refused admission, so he drifted back among the lodges on the shore to keep himself informed as to the movements of the young Indian and his sweetheart.

It had been nearly dusk when Hallam had sought Norma. It was dark, now, and in leaving the tepees he was nearly knocked down by running into the hind quarter of a caribou, hung on a limb. Immediately the thought of food for their venture came to him, and he flung the meat over his shoulder.

As he reached the cabin he was surprised that no light greeted him. Norma had probably covered the window, he thought, and going to the door, he knocked, calling softly.

There was no answer. He called again and pushed the door partly open. Still no answer. The cabin was dark. He entered quickly and made a light. The room was empty. Norma was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

REALIZATION

HALLAM stood in the center of the floor, a nameless dread clutching at his heart. At first he thought that Norma might have left the cabin only for a moment, but there was a certain look of desertion about the place that set its denial upon this. The next explanation that swept across his mind was that she had been attacked by Stevenson and carried to his house against her will, but he remembered that he had not been out of hearing and that she never would have left the cabin without a tremendous struggle—and Norma was strong. She would be a match for many a man, and certainly for one in the factor's condition.

Hallam's eye fell upon the lower bunk where she had slept. The sleeping-bag she had been using as a mattress was not there. He glanced along the walls. Several articles of clothing had disappeared, as well as a frying-pan from the cooking kit and an

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aluminum tea-pot. Hastily leaving the cabin he made his way to the dead birch where the rifles had been hidden. Both were missing. Next he crept down to the shore where the canoe had lain. There was no canoe. All doubt had been dismissed from his mind. Norma had gone—gone without a hint of her intention, without a word for him. Slowly he walked back, and closing the door threw himself on his bed.

That she had always hated the place he well knew, but that she had felt no uneasiness from the thought of physical menace to herself he was sure. The ogling of Stevenson, though it had disgusted her, had caused no real apprehension, and the factor had made no overt advances. That she felt secure in his own company and trusted him as completely as a child might have done, he was convinced.

Finally his review of the situation brought him down to the fight with the factor. Could Norma have overheard the man's proposal to let him go and to detain her? As he remembered it, Stevenson's words had been spoken almost in his ear and in so low a tone that no one else could have caught them.

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Try as he would, he failed completely to solve the riddle. It hurt him to think that she had deliberately deserted of her own free will. He could not believe it. They had been so close to each other—had become such intimate companions, sharing everything, food, drink, even clothing. They might have been brother and sister, or closer than that, two brothers, living side by side in perfect confidence. It was not like Norma to conceal, to plan in secrecy or to turn disloyal. There must be some explanation.

It occurred to him that she might have seen an opportunity to steal away with the canoe unobserved, and had taken it and was awaiting a chance to come back for him after she had hidden the craft further down the shore. That both rifles were gone seemed to bear out such a theory.

As Hallam turned the matter over again and again he decided not to attempt to follow. If she had meant that, she would have given him some sign. She even might have written a few words to guide him, for she was able now to scrawl a round, childish hand. He searched the cabin thoroughly but there was nothing. He threw himself on his bunk

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again and tossed his arms above his head. As he did so his hand struck something and he turned on his elbow to look. Pulling up the corner of the sleeping-bag he felt the leather scabbard of his automatic. The weapon was inside. She had left it—for him.

He searched again for a possible note, but without result. He found himself constantly on edge, waiting, listening. At every sound he started in the hope that Norma was returning, but the sounds he heard were the rustlings of the breeze about the eaves, the lapping of the waters of the lake, the talk from the Indians' camp, or the movements of Myra in the factor's house next door, where the squaw had again taken command.

The hours passed and Hallam still waited, supperless, ready on the instant to rise and follow if the girl should give a sign. At length, worn with the tensivity of his mind he fell asleep and awoke shivering. He crawled inside his bag, listened awhile and slept again, only to dream of her and wake with a start, to realize that she was not there.

With the first graying of the dawn he rose and silently stole down to the lake. He found her footprints on the shore, plainly

Realization

marked in the soft earth, and carefully obliterated them. There were no other fresh prints. The young Indian and the girl had not come to carry out their little excursion, after all.

Hallam realized, now that Norma had gotten fairly away, that it was his part to keep her absence a secret as long as possible. If she had paddled all night she must have put many miles between her and the post, and pursuit would be almost impracticable. That she was on her way to her own camp he had little doubt. There was nowhere else for her to go, but her recapture, there, should Stevenson think it worth while, would be an easy matter. He knew that the place lay scarcely fifty miles to the westward, and that it was possible to reach it by canoe at this season of the year when the lakes and streams were running full. Norma had often spoken of it, and told how quickly the distance could be traveled.

But beyond her return to the place she called "home" Hallam could not follow her plan. He liked to think that she intended in some manner to get word to him, but unless she came herself he could see no way. If

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she intended to return openly what could have been her reason for leaving?

As Hallam started back to the cabin he heard a rustling in the bushes, and the owner of the canoe suddenly stood before him. Instantly the thought came that he must make friends with this young man. In another moment he would find that his canoe was gone and the fact of Norma's escape would be known.

Hallam stopped and held out his hand.

"How," he said.

The youth took it and gave back the greeting.

"Your canoe?" asked Hallam, indicating where the craft had lain.

"Yeh-h," replied the youth, nodding.

"Gone!"

"Ah-h-h!" ejaculated the other, springing forward and staring at the place.

"Gone!" repeated Hallam. "White squaw, she take in night. Far away, now."

The Indian had very little English, but by signs and gestures Hallam made him understand. Then, to gain as much time for her as possible, he declared that she would come back, and that no one must know.

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If he kept the secret Hallam would pay him well. The Indian's eyes, which had been sullen, brightened at this and he asked how much.

"This," answered Hallam, and he drew the heavy automatic from beneath his coat. "When I leave the post you shall have it."

The young man's eyes danced and he fingered the weapon with great admiration. Hallam showed him the action, and how it would shoot ten times by merely pulling the trigger.

In the joy of anticipated possession the youth readily agreed to keep silence, and the two parted with smiles and good will.

Hallam felt that he could trust the boy and that he had done well. Norma's absence would remain unknown, now, for at least a few hours longer, and if it were her intention to keep on from her camp south to the great lake she would be fairly safe from pursuit. At all events, working in the dark as he was, he had done what he could.

On leaving the Indian he walked toward the factor's house and saw Myra at the door with a rough, home-made broom of twigs vigorously sweeping. He went in.

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"Miss Leonard, the white girl, is sick," he told her. "I want the medicine box." He looked about for Stevenson, intending him to hear, but the door of the back room was tightly closed. He took the box and departed, and all that day he remained close in his cabin, cooking his own food, as indeed he and Norma had done ever since their utensils had been brought in with the sledge.

At night a faint hope came back to him that Norma might still return. He lay for a long time thinking of her. He had grown accustomed to her presence, her simple ways, her gentleness and adaptability. Her quickness at reading him, her eagerness to learn, her intense interest in the many things he had told her, and withal her own gracious, vital personality had made her a companion such as he had never before known. The many women of his acquaintance were all more or less of a type. This girl was as unspoiled as the clean, bright air of a spring morning. She was woefully ignorant, it was true, but her quickness of perception, combined with her native good sense and power of reason, together with the refinements of speech and habit she had taken from her

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father, removed her so far from the condition of common illiteracy that she seemed more like a stranger from a far country, cultured according to her native standard and merely unversed in the ways of a new land.

And through all his thought of Norma Leonard there ran an undercurrent that bore the image of Sophia Burton, Sophia the polished, the educated, the refined; Sophia, who stood for the finished type of modern society woman, sophisticated, all-seeing, cold, selfish. Unconsciously he found himself comparing her with Norma, Norma the generous, the unspoiled; Norma the true, the pure-hearted, strong, gentle, self-reliant, brave. He remembered the fortitude, the unflinching courage she had displayed on their journey back from the musk-ox ground, and the self-willed endurance which had

“Made each nerve and sinew serve
Their turn long after they are gone”

and which had brought him staggering blindly into the pathway of light that had streamed from the factor's door.

And finally he saw her as she had stood

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and looked at him when he told her that the furs he had come so far to find were for a woman.

"Did she know how you would have to get them?" had been Norma Leonard's question, and even now he felt his face flush hot as he remembered how he had been forced to answer "Yes."

He saw again the shame for him that had come into her eyes, and he felt again the shame that had shot through him in answer to it. He wished he had then and there renounced his mission, for he was realizing, as he lay staring with wide eyes into the dark, that what this girl of the Barren Grounds thought of him was of more consequence than anything else in the world. Norma! He almost called her name aloud.

Suddenly the longing for her—to see her, to hear her voice, to feel her presence near him, to touch her, became as insistent as the hunger-pain in a starving man. He leaped back to that first meeting at the door of the log house where her father lay dead—that first, firm hand-clasp, the first clearing of the fine frown that had shadowed her eyes. He remembered those first days with

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her; the simplicity of her acceptance of him, and once he had been accepted, her absolute trust, instinctive, like that of a child; then the savage journey through the white desert, the hunt, the wild protest at his outrage against all maternity, the struggle in the storm and his conquering of her by pure, brute strength. He could see still the light in her eyes, fierce, untamed, fired by the sheer lust of battle, and he remembered how, as he bent over her in the falling snow, it had faded and died out, leaving only gentleness and—what other thing?

He thought of the days of toil and hardship that followed; how they had dressed each other's wounds, and then lain down side by side in their house of snow; how her hand had made a pillow for his cheek, and—was it the shadow of a dream?—how once in the night he had felt her lips brush his eyes.

He remembered the one time when her splendid courage had failed, and, worn with fatigue, she had given way to loneliness and sorrow, and he had taken her in his arms and kissed her tears. The exquisite sense of nearness came to him again, the perfume of

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her hair, of her skin, the warmth of her body, the sheer physical delight that her whole person had borne to him. Hallam turned and his arms went out in emptiness and his heart filled his breast with a warmth he had never felt till now, for he had come to know that he loved Norma Leonard—loved her with all the manhood there was in him, with a love that was overmastering—strong as death.

CHAPTER XXV

WHAT THE THIRD DAY BROUGHT

HALLAM slept little that night. In the morning, when he awoke from a final hour of heavy slumber, his first thought was of Norma. It had been his habit to stretch his arm down from his bunk, and if she were not still asleep she would touch his hand and speak. Unconsciously he did so on this morning, but there was no answering voice or touch.

He roused himself and leaped to the floor. The sun was clear in the sky and the light frost was already disappearing from the grass. Hastily plunging his face and head into a basin, he threw on his coat and flung the door wide.

The post was astir, and the Indians, now ready to trade, were bringing their furs from their tepees and spreading them on the ground for inspection. Hallam looked for the factor's bulky figure, but he was not about. Building a fire in the stove he put a teapot

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to boil and set about his simple breakfast, his thoughts still only of Norma and her strange absence. This was the third day and the idea of her coming back had definitely left him. There was one thing for him to do, now, and only one—he must follow her.

He ceased to speculate on her reason for going. She may have intended to return and had been unable for a dozen different reasons. Something might have happened! The thought came like a blow. He had not considered that possibility, for it was not like Norma to allow things to happen. She was so strong, so quick, so sure of herself; and her whole life had been lived in the open.

But he could not dismiss the fear. It grew and grew till it became an obsession. He imagined all sorts of horrible things—a dangerous rapid, taken in the dark; a heavy wind on a lake, or her passage stopped by ice, forcing her to make camp, hungry and cold, to wait for the barrier to break.

He found his map and studied the position of the lakes and the courses of the streams. If the map was accurate the waterway formed by lakes and connecting thoroughfares was practically continuous to a point within two

What the Third Day Brought

or three miles of Norma's camp, which could then be reached by a portage over a low-lying ridge. One thing in a measure relieved his mind. There was no quick-water on the route. The distance was something under fifty miles.

Long before his breakfast was cooked Hallam had made his determination and a half-formed plan. He would leave the post at the first opportunity. There were two ways—one, to bribe his young Indian acquaintance into leaving a canoe where he could reach it unseen, after dark; the other, the more desperate plan of boldly stealing a craft under the very noses of the Indians and making a dash, trusting to darkness to aid him, and to his automatic to discourage pursuit.

With Norma safely out of the post there was no chance, now, that he might not take. Even his forcible recapture and detention could scarcely make matters worse, either for him or for her.

Preoccupied, busy with his thoughts, Hallam did not notice that a shadow had darkened the doorway, and it was only when a heavy, uncertain foot crossed the threshold

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that he turned. As he saw the huge form of Stevenson above him he sprang to his feet and his right hand slid back beneath his coat.

But in an instant it dropped to his side, for the figure before him was shaking and quivering from head to foot. The man's eyes, burning dully, were sunk deep behind puffy, livid lids and his lower lip hung slack and trembling. Instead of the big, powerful brute he knew, Hallam saw a tottering, nerveless wreck, sodden, dirty, reeking of whiskey at every pore—a loathsome spectacle of drunken degradation.

For a moment the two stood, Hallam staring in disgust at the creature who could not meet his eye. Then he pushed a stool forward.

“Sit down, Stevenson.”

The factor dropped upon it, his shoulders hunched, his head sunk into his coat, his hands incessantly moving, tremulous and uncontrolled.

“Ah-h,” he sighed, raising his black, swollen fingers to brush the drops of sweat from his face. “Ah-h, Meester Hallam, but I am seeck, mon! I canna sleep, I canna eat.

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Hae ye the medicine box? The wumman tellit me ye hae borrowed it for the Meestress Leonard."

"I have it," said Hallam, taking it from the lower bunk.

The factor's shaking hands tore it open and fumbled with the contents. Hallam, watching, saw him choose a bottle and caught the sign of a black skull and bones on its red poison-label.

"What's that?" he asked, quickly, and then glimpsed the word "Laudanum" as Stevenson tried to drop it into his coat pocket.

"Look here, Stevenson," said Hallam, "what are you going to do with that? That's a deadly poison, you know."

"It wull mak' me sleep—sleep. That's what I maun hae. I wull hae it. Mon, ye dinna ken——!"

"I *ken* one thing," said Hallam shortly. "If a man in your condition takes laudanum he is likely to go to sleep—and he is just as likely never to wake up."

"I dinna care," muttered the factor. "I hae no closed an ee these twa nichts, and I wull hae sleep."

"What you need," said Hallam, cruelly,

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"is a good stiff drink—the hair of the dog that bit you—to straighten you out."

Stevenson started up with a cry.

"Ye dinna mean—ye dinna mean ye hae a drap o' whuskey? Mon, I could gie ye my life for it."

Trembling with an eagerness that was pitiable, he clutched at Hallam's sleeve. The younger man threw him off in disgust.

"I've no whiskey, Stevenson," he said. "I wish I had. I suppose you'd give me my skins and let me go for one good bracer."

"God, mon, ye hae guessed the recht o't. I wud gie ye the whole univairse if I possessed it. I no hae been wi'oot whuskey three days in twenty year. I'm deen' for the lack. I'm daft for the want o' it. Canna ye see?"

"I see," said Hallam, turning away. "Some one stole your stuff, eh? Well, you'll get over it in two or three days, if you don't kill yourself with laudanum."

The man on the stool muttered and shook his head, his eyes fixed on the death's head of the label.

"One wee drappie wullna kill. Read me

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the dose, mon. I maun sleep an hour, live or dee. Read it—I ask it o’ ye.”

Hallam took the bottle and read the dose for an adult.

“Take it,” he said, passing the bottle back, “only get out of here. I don’t want to be accused of poisoning you.”

As Stevenson took the bottle in his stiff, puffed fingers, he fumbled it, and slipping from his palm it fell and broke with a tinkling sound on the rough floor. The factor uttered a cry, and fell on his knees like a man who sees his only hope fleeing from him. Sobbing and quivering he groveled, even thrusting his lips into the little pool as it seeped rapidly, maddeningly through the cracks in the hewn spruce poles.

Disgusted, Hallam clutched the factor by the shoulders and dragged him back. Then lifting him to his feet he propelled him to the door, cursing and struggling, swearing that the breaking of the bottle had been Hallam’s intention from the first.

“I’ll hae the life o’ ye for it,” he yelled. “I’ll send ye on the lang traverse, by God, this verra day. An’ I’m a mon o’ my worrd, mark ye that, noo!”

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Hallam pushed him outside and the Scotchman stood shaking his fist and fulminating oaths, half weeping with rage and impotence.

But Hallam was not listening. As rigid as if turned to stone he stood in the doorway, his eyes fixed on a little speck far down the southward reach of the lake. The speck seemed to move. It did move, slowly, crawling close to shore. Stevenson, still mouthing curses, hardly able to walk, his legs shaking so that they threatened to fail him altogether, staggered toward his own house.

But Hallam did not notice. His eyes never left that moving black dot. Hope and fear fought in his breast, as he watched it grow into the shape of a canoe. One person was paddling with short, even strokes. To Hallam they seemed too even, as if made in the deadly, mechanical rhythm of fatigue.

The canoe moved very slowly. Hugging the shore-line, it had not yet advanced into view from the tepees, and Hallam, affecting to saunter aimlessly, made his way to the willows on the bank. There he waited, screened from the eyes of the post, his heart beating wildly.

Gradually the distance lessened, the toil-

What the Third Day Brought

ing figure in the stern plying wearily the paddle. Now the craft was almost blotted out in the dark shadow of the spruces. Now—Hallam gave a low cry. The sunlight, filtering through a break in the trees, struck for an instant full upon the lone canoeman. One hand suddenly shot high in signal. Hallam's arm instantly flung back an answer.

The paddler was Norma Leonard.

CHAPTER XXVI

A WOMAN'S BARGAIN

TO Hallam the final ten minutes before the canoe's bow touched the shore was an aeon of time. He stood by the willow bush straining his eyes to clearly see the girl's face, his lips again and again forming her name. Once she raised her head and the ghost of a recognition passed across her face; then she bent to her paddle, never breaking the rhythm of her stroke, as if to cease would mean collapse.

At last yards only separated them. Hallam, unable to wait longer, waded in, and grasping the bow, pulled the craft high on the shore. The paddle, its work well done, dropped from the girl's hand and she sank forward, grasping the gunwales, her chin dropping on her breast.

Up to his knees in the ooze, in an instant Hallam had her in his arms.

"Norma! Norma! You've come back! You've come back!"

A Woman's Bargain

She straightened herself.

"How—how is Stevenson?" she whispered hoarsely.

"Stevenson!" he repeated. That her first thought should be of Stevenson was unimaginable. "Stevenson is sick, whiskey-sick. He's as sick as a man can well be—of life. Why do you ask for him, Norma?"

"Thank God!" she murmured, and her eyes closed.

Completely puzzled, half-believing that she was ill and in delirium, Hallam raised her from the bottom of the canoe, and with his arm steadied her as she stiffly stepped out. At first she could hardly stand from the cramping of her kneeling position, but soon, with Hallam's help, she began to move slowly up the bank.

As they reached the cabin a sound inside made Hallam suddenly halt. Leaving Norma, he loosened his pistol ready to his hand and kicked the door open. What he saw was Stevenson, on hands and knees, tearing the dry spruce boughs from Norma's bunk and pitching them behind him in armfuls, rummaging like a dog that scents a hidden bone.

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Signing to Norma to stay where she was, Hallam leaped in. He seized the factor by the shoulders and hurled him back. Swiftly the man's hand sought his hip, where Hallam saw that a heavy Colt was slung. Instantly Hallam's own automatic was out.

"Drop it," he rasped, and the factor's hand fell limp.

"What are you doing here?"

The unveiled threat of Hallam's tone turned Stevenson's sudden show of spirit to abjection. His face went damp with sweat and he was again the quivering alcoholic, unnerved, ready to collapse.

"Don't, Ransford. I think I know what he is searching for."

It was Norma. She had entered silently and stood looking at the factor, pity and disgust showing in her eyes. She was feeling in the pocket of her coat. She drew forth something and held it out to Hallam.

"Give him this," she said.

It was a half-pint flask, full of an amber-colored liquid. Stevenson saw it.

"Oh my God!" he cried. "It's whusky, the thing I maun hae or dee."

He made a lunge, tripped and went down

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on his knees. Hallam backed away, watching him carefully. Stevenson followed, scuttering along the floor, his hands outstretched, his eyes wild, his jaw slack, drooling at the mouth.

"Gie it to me, i' the name o' God," he screamed. "Gie it——"

Hallam thrust the bottle into his open hands.

With his teeth Stevenson snatched out the cork and spat it from him, and in the same motion tipped the flask, clutching it with both hands, the liquor gurgling horridly in his throat.

Hallam turned to Norma. There was a look on her face that he had never seen before, an expression of quiet triumph, cynical, a trifle grim. Her eyes never left the man on the floor. The flask was half-emptied before it left his mouth. A great shiver shook his shoulders. He gagged and coughed, and the loose, slaverling lips closed again on the bottle-neck. Not until the last drop was drained did the man relinquish it. Then he slowly rose, his eyes reddened and streaming. He saw Norma and took a step toward her.

"Ye ha' saved my life," he whispered when

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he could speak. "That's what ye ha' done. Hae—hae ye more—more o' the liquor, Mees-tress Leonard?"

Hallam would have burst out at him, but the girl raised her hand.

"Yes, I have more," she said.

"Ye hae it hid!" groaned Stevenson, "an' wi' me sufferin' near to death for the want. Whaur is it, girl? Ye wullna keep it frae me!"

"What would you give for it, Stevenson?"

Hallam saw at last. It was for this that Norma had paddled and tramped a hundred miles through the flooded wilderness—to buy a drunkard with his dearest coin—to bribe the way to freedom.

"What will you give?" repeated the girl.

She stood straight and tall, looking the factor hard between the eyes, her brows meeting in that fine frown Hallam had learned to know so well. Her fatigue seemed to have dropped from her and her voice rang clear again.

"Give?" coughed the man. "What' wull a body no gie for life? Ye can name the price."

"Our freedom and the musk-ox skins," came from Norma like a flash.

A Woman's Bargain

Stevenson's eyes grew canny.

"Whaur hae ye hid it?" he asked. "Are ye sure I canna find it by mysel?"

"No, you cannot find it," returned the girl, coolly. "It is safe as long as I choose to keep silent—cached beyond the thoroughfare, more than two hours by canoe from here."

"Cached, ye say! Ye maun speak the truth, girl. Ye hae no been frae the post since ye set foot in it."

He said it with a sneer, and Hallam took a step forward, a warning in his eye.

"I *have* left the post since I came here. I left it three days ago and went to my father's camp. I have just come back. Ask the young Indian, whose canoe I took."

Stevenson stared.

"Three days!" he muttered, "an' ye went to bring whusky? To buy me?"

"Yes," said the girl, shortly. "Just that."

"And hae ye much?" cautiously inquired the factor, with a cunning leer. "It is worth the price!"

"It is what I could carry on my back—and I am strong," she answered. "Listen; you will send for the young Indian. He will

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take another canoe and paddle you. When we reach the cache you shall have the whiskey—two jugs of it. We will keep on. Is that satisfactory?"

"When wull ye start?"

The question came from Stevenson with the air of finality. He accepted. The victory was won.

"When the sun crosses the ridge," said Norma. "Now I want to sleep."

Stevenson looked at the girl and then at the empty bottle in his hand. The comfort of the liquor he had drunk was filling him, but he knew that before long the craving would return tenfold. He shivered slightly and glanced at Hallam.

"I maun go wi ye," he said. "Ye shall hae the pelties, Meester Hallam. I congratulate ye on yon young leddy. She is a rare braw lassie—auld Norman Leonard's bairn."

The factor turned to go out. Hallam stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"You'll go unarmed, Stevenson," he said, "and so will the Indian. He'll be paid for his canoe when we part company." 

Stevenson hesitated, nodded assent and moved toward the door. Hallam followed.

A Woman's Bargain

"Besides that," he said, "I want a safe conduct from you in writing, addressed to the factors of this territory, stating who we are and bespeaking for us their courtesy."

"Ye shall hae it," grunted the factor, and departed.

When Hallam turned to speak to Norma the girl was lying on his bunk, her eyes already closed. He stepped near, but she did not move. One dark, roughened braid fell over the side nearly to the floor. Hallam stood for a moment, watching the regular rise and fall of her breast. Then he touched the braid, took it in his hands and kissed it, and laid it softly across her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE CACHE

OUTSIDE the cabin door Hallam waited as the sun swung toward the long ridge. Guarding Norma lest her sleep be broken, he had sat there for nearly six hours, alone with his thoughts. There had been no opportunity for him to ask about her journey, its hardships or its perils. He only knew that she had come back to him, bringing the means of liberty for them both.

But out of the whole matter one thought loomed larger than all the rest. She had done it for him. Unasked, unaided, she had traveled a hundred miles, alone, through a practically unknown labyrinth of waters to buy his freedom, and what was more, to regain for him the forbidden furs which she knew were to adorn another woman. Why had she done this? The answer flashed through Hallam's mind with the suddenness of lightning. She loved him! Norma Leonard loved him!

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The thrill of it sang in him like wine. It must be true. What girl in the world would have braved the dangers of flood and field, of darkness and storm unless for the man she loved? Impatiently he watched the sun, waiting for the time when he might waken her and tell her what was bursting from his heart.

At last the moment came, and Hallam rose and softly entered. The girl lay as he had left her, the great plait of her hair still across her eyes, shielding them from the light. He crossed the floor softly and stood looking down at her. Gently he drew the hair away, and stooping laid his lips where it had rested, whispering her name.

The girl stirred slightly. Her lips parted in a smile and her cheek nestled closer in the hollow of her arm.

“Sweetheart!”

For a second time Hallam touched her and stood waiting. Her eyes opened.

“Oh!” she said. “It is you. I was dreaming.”

The eyes closed again for a moment and a little sigh came from her lips. Then she grasped the edge of the bunk and sat up.

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"Is it time?" she asked, peering through the miniature window. "I didn't remember for a moment. Sleeping in so many different places is confusing."

"Are you rested?" Hallam asked, as she slipped to the floor.

"Yes. I must have been sleeping here for hours. How is Stevenson?"

"He hasn't appeared. I will find him while you are getting ready."

"Can you handle a canoe?" she asked, filling the basin.

"I used to, after a fashion. I can keep the bow straight without shifting my paddle, but in a wind or a stiff rapid I have my doubts."

"Never mind," she said, splashing her face with icy water. "I can take the stern."

There was a brusqueness about her tone that Hallam vaguely resented, and at the door he turned, hesitating. Her awakening was somehow not as he had thought of it. Her manner was not that of a girl who had made a sacrifice for the man she loved. He had been so sure of her motive. Could it be that he was after all mistaken—that some other reason had sent her on her mission?

Troubled by growing doubt he walked

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slowly to the factor's door and entered. Myra, the squaw, rose from a chair, scowling.

"What you want?"

"Stevenson. Where is he?" Hallam answered shortly.

The woman pointed to the door at the rear and without more words he pushed it open. The factor was lying on his bunk, his eyes half closed. At Hallam's entrance he started violently and sat up. His hands, as he passed them nervously over his face, shook noticeably, and his eyes constantly shifted from Hallam about the room.

"It is time to go."

Stevenson grunted an inarticulate reply.

"Where are the skins?"

The factor pointed to a small bundle. Hallam picked it up and counted the pelts. They were all there. He noticed the factor's Colt slung by its belt across the foot of the bunk.

"I'll take this. You can have it again when you leave us. Have Myra pack a week's provisions."

Hallam buckled the weapon about his waist and stood waiting.

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"Ye hae no anither wee drap o' liquor before we start?" hinted Stevenson.

Hallam had no cause to pity him, but as he looked on this quivering wreck of a strong man, he could not help a feeling of sympathy.

"No," he said. "If I had you should have it. But the faster we go the nearer you are to the stuff you want. We'll get started at once."

Stevenson rose weakly, making no protest against his disarming and followed Hallam out. Myra, watching, darted forward, but the factor pushed her from him with an oath and they left the house. On the shore the young Indian was already waiting with a canoe. Hallam signed to him to paddle down to Norma's landing place, and leaving Stevenson hurried to the cabin.

Norma, with a bundle already made of their few belongings, met him at the door. She said nothing, and Hallam, shouldering the pack, led the way toward the canoes. Once he stopped and waited for her to come close.

"The rifles?" he whispered.

"Cached," she nodded, and they went on. As they reached the shore they found

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Stevenson seated in the second canoe with the Indian, ready to push off. Hallam swiftly scanned the craft for any sign of weapons, but there was nothing and he told them to go on ahead. There was no wind, and turning to Norma, he asked:

"Is there any bad water between here and your cache?"

The girl shook her head.

"Then I'd better take the heavy work. You still need all the rest you can get, and I certainly can keep up with that Indian lad and the load he has aboard."

Norma made no objection, and stowing the packs took her seat amidships.

"You may criticize all you like," Hallam grinned, as he shoved off. "I expect a professional lesson or two would do me no harm."

He had not paddled a canoe for years and made awkward work of it at first, but following a quiet correction or two from Norma he soon caught the short, rhythmic swing he saw the Indian using, and learned how to get his back and shoulder into the stroke. A little breeze sprang up behind them, and they began to make good progress. After a time, Norma settled back against the sleeping-bags

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and closed her eyes. She had been strangely silent, and Hallam, laying it to weariness that her sleep had not overcome, forebore to talk.

The sun slowly dropped down the western sky until it rested blazing on the summit of the low, rocky spur that bounded the lake. Before it disappeared Norma roused herself, and turning, looked ahead. Stevenson and the Indian were a few hundred yards in the lead, the lad paddling steadily. Then, soothed by the gentle rhythm of motion, she lay back and presently dozed again.

Now the lake began to narrow until it became more like a stagnant stream, but a little farther on a current showed in the smooth swirlings of the water. Hallam, doubtful of his watermanship, increased his speed until he had the other canoe well in sight and then followed the Indian's course. But the rocks were well covered by the high water and his fears were needless.

As it grew dark they came out into a second lake, smaller than the one they left. They had been paddling for more than two hours.

"Norma," Hallam said softly, "we must be nearly there."

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The girl sat up abruptly and peered ahead into the gathering gloom.

"Yes," she said. "Call to them to stop."

As the Indian ahead ceased paddling, Norma leaned over the thwart and cautioned Hallam.

"Don't raise your voice. The sound carries so. Paddle up to them and tell them to wait where they are until we leave the little point on the right, where the birch tree stands alone. The liquor will be there."

"I promised the Indian my automatic in payment for his canoe. I will leave it with the whiskey."

Norma frowned.

"No," she said. "That would be bad. You promised to give the factor back his weapon. Leave it, but no cartridges with it. See if the Indian understands what this is."

She reached into the neck of her shirt and drew out a small bag. Hallam heard the clink of coins as she tossed it to him. He emptied them into the palm of his hand. There were twenty double eagles.

"Norma!" he exclaimed under his breath.

"It is gold," she said, "the thing all men desire. Is it enough?"

Hallam slid all the coins but two into the

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bag again and passed it back on his paddle-blade.

"Two will be more gold than the boy has ever seen," he said.

They came up with Stevenson, and Hallam gave him his instructions.

"You'll find your gun with the jug," he told him. The Indian at first demurred at not receiving the prized automatic, but he was silenced by Stevenson, who was suffering the untold tortures of alcoholic thirst, and without further talk Hallam paddled on.

As the canoe grated on the shore of the little point Norma sprang out and Hallam followed.

"Watch the canoe," she said. "I will find the cache."

She disappeared in the darkness and Hallam heard her splash through a shallow pool of snow-water; then silence. In ten minutes he caught the sound of rustling bushes and saw her figure silhouetted against the azure of the sky, as for an instant she halted on the rising ground. He sprang to help her as she clambered down to the shore, and as he took her burden from her he wondered how she had ever carried the two heavy jugs over

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the three-mile portage from her own camp. They would have made a wearying load for a strong man.

"Be careful," warned the girl, "don't let them knock together. I'll get the rifles." In a moment she was back, and leaving the jugs at the foot of the birch tree, together with Stevenson's empty revolver, they pushed off. When well out from the point Hallam fired one shot from his automatic as a signal.

Norma, kneeling in the bow, took up the second paddle.

"They're heading in for the point," she said, quietly. "Skirt the shore in the shadow of the trees."

"You don't expect them to follow?" questioned Hallam in surprise.

"There's ice in the western arm of this lake," answered the girl. "We must get through before the wind rises and fills the channel."

Under two paddles the canoe shot ahead into the darkness, guided only by the sky-line of the shore, the water gurgling softly beneath the bow at each stroke. The voices of Stevenson and the Indian came across the intervening space as they found the jugs at

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the foot of the birch. Hallam fancied he could hear the factor's cough of satisfaction as the first swallow of fiery liquor gurgled down his throat.

The girl paused anxiously from time to time, resting her paddle and listening. The sound of voices had ceased, and there was silence, except for the rising wind. But as they neared the foot of the lake another sound came to their ears, a whispering, insistent sound, growing louder and more distinct as they advanced. Norma suddenly stopped paddling. The wind had shifted more to the west and was blowing harder. What they heard was the broken ice from the westerly arm of the lake, hissing and grinding as it was pressed slowly out into the narrow, swirling thoroughfare.

"We're too late," broke from the girl's lips. "The channel is filled."

And Hallam, peering ahead, caught the shimmer of white on the water where blackness had been before.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHY THE BARREL LEAKED

“**T**HE thoroughfare is a mile long,” said Norma, taking in the situation at once. “We shall have to camp.”

“Then it might as well be here,” replied Hallam, swinging the bow of the canoe toward the shore.

“No,” said the girl. “There’s an island. Paddle straight out.”

They had not gone above a quarter-mile when a dark bulk loomed ahead, standing out high and black against the dimly-lit sky. They circled to the left and found a landing place on the easterly side. Pulling the canoe high up out of any possible danger from piling ice, they explored the place. It was little more than a great rock, less than half an acre in extent, precipitous on its northerly side and sloping gradually to the lake on the south. Half-way up there was a level spot, where grew a few birches and small spruces, and here they spread the sleeping-bags.

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Gathering such dry wood as he could find in the dark Hallam started a small fire in the shelter of a boulder. He set the pot to boil and they made a light meal, enjoying the comfort of their hot tea. Norma was still disinclined to talk and answered Hallam's questions about the ice in monosyllables.

· He gathered that the channel might be free the next day or it might be a week, according as the wind shifted or remained in its present quarter.

· Puzzled at her reticence, he tried to discover the reason.

· "Norma," he asked, finally, "what is troubling you? Here we are, free and well on our road, yet you seem more depressed than at any time since I have known you. What is it?"

· "Am I?" she replied. "Perhaps I am tired. Perhaps——"

He caught a little choking sound.

"You are homesick?"

She did not answer, and reaching out he laid his hand gently on her shoulder. At first she did not move. Then she rose, still silent, and walked a little distance away, gazing southward at the blockading ice-field.

Why the Barrel Leaked

Disturbed at her evident distress of mind, Hallam did not follow, but went up the slope to their sleeping place. With the axe he cut a stunted spruce, and stripping it of its boughs made a bed on which he placed Norma's bag. Before he had finished she appeared and stood watching.

"That is good of you," she said, gravely. "I *am* tired."

When it was finished she at once lay down, and, still perplexed, Hallam crawled into his own bag which he had laid but a few feet away. For a time they lay in silence. Hallam, just able to see her face, waited for her to speak, but she did not.

"Norma," he said.

"Yes."

Her tone showed weariness and it disconcerted him, for there were many things he wished to say. In spite of himself when he spoke again his words came somehow not at all as he wished them to come.

"Norma, you haven't given me an opportunity to thank you. I want you to know how I appreciate what you have done. It was a brave thing for a girl to do. Will you tell me how you knew Stevenson's price?"

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For a moment she did not answer.

"I hoped you would not ask me that," she said at last, "but I will tell you. I knew because—my father was a drunkard."

Hallam's low exclamation of sympathy brought no further explanation.

"And the whiskey?"

"My father made it from the barley that we raised."

The shortness of her replies told him that she did not wish to speak further, but a thought had come to Hallam's mind that would not lie unsatisfied.

"It was a strange thing, Norma, that this chance came—strange that Stevenson's whiskey should have disappeared under lock and key."

Suddenly he raised himself on his elbow.

"Norma, do you know how the barrel happened to leak?"

"Yes," came the reply. "I turned the spigot."

CHAPTER XXIX

WHAT HALLAM SAW IN THE NIGHT

HE could not have told how long he lay, looking deep into the steel blue of the sky, that showed, star-spangled, through the tracery of bare birch branches. He was body-weary from the unaccustomed exercise of paddling, but though he recognized in Norma the cause of his wakefulness he did not try to put her away from his thoughts. Rather he welcomed her, striving to solve the riddle of her strange aloofness. For the first time since they had trailed the sub-Arctic snows together she had seemed to close the door against him. She had shown no distrust, but somehow there was a rift in the almost perfect comradeship, an intangible something that had forced itself between them.

Hallam strove to examine it, to discover its nature, to pierce it with his mind's eye, but each time it baffled him. The belief that he had held only a few hours before,

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when he had sat waiting for the sun to cross the ridge—the belief that Norma loved him—had become clouded with doubt, and now doubt was turning to despair. What had he done? What had he left undone to merit her attitude?

What had he left undone? The question started a new sequence in his thoughts. Suddenly he saw himself as she must see him, a man who walked through life relying upon others to bear his burdens, a do-nothing, a weakling in the face of problems that it is a man's business to solve, one of those helpless individuals who, when difficulties arise which are insurmountable at first glance, sit down and wait, or else cry out for help, saying, "Here I am. Save me. I am willing to pay."

His wretched attempt to bargain with Stevenson for release came back to him in new perspective—his attempt to pay with a promise to pay, to bribe the factor into winking at the law of the land and the iron-hard rules of his employers. The law!

"There's never a law of God or man runs north of fifty-three."

He had come there to break a law. He had

What Hallam Saw in the Night

broken it, and then, like a child—like a boy who throws a snowball in the street, he had cowered before a phantom—had lain supine, a prisoner because a drunken old man had told him that he must. He was like a burglar entering a building to rob, who turns back at the sight of a sign, “No trespassers allowed.”

For the hundredth time the words of Sophia Burton crossed his brain in staring letters: “I wonder what you would do if you ever found yourself in a position where your money could not help you. Would you be equal to the lone fight, or would you let circumstances and the men behind them put you under?”

How had he met the test? Had he forced the hand of circumstance and played a man’s part in a finish fight against odds, or had he allowed circumstance to cow him with one sullen look, while he left it to a woman to play the man?

“Good God!” groaned Hallam under his breath.

That was what he had done. He had left it to a woman to bring him through, and now she despised him for it.

The puzzle of Norma’s reserve toward him seemed solved. He saw it all quite clearly.

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He had come into the North because one woman had called him a quitter. He was going out of it with the same word, unspoken, on the lips of another—on the lips of the girl he loved.

It was one of those rare moments, when, in the hush of the night there comes, for a few brief moments, an almost uncanny clarity of vision, when there stands revealed the truth—truth, naked and boldly lighted. So it was with Ransford Hallam. He saw himself, inbred with generations of luxury and ease, cared for and fostered by others, weakened by comfort and the absence of the need to fight, reared in soft living until the spirit had become enervated through sheer disuse.

And in contrast he saw Norma Leonard, a splendid figure of strength, courage and willingness to serve. Lettered or unlettered, what difference did it make? It is human character, and that only, which is worthy to be reckoned with, and for the first time in his whole life Ransford Hallam saw it and recognized it as the truth. Pride, self-esteem, tradition, the position that may be bought with money, culture, breeding, all fell in an

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impotent and vainglorious litter, played upon pitilessly by the white search-light of reality. He saw his own character stripped bare, and winced as he viewed the dim, pale thing, barely able to stand alone, leaning for support upon the strength of another, who calmly stretched out her strong hand and accepted the burden—her eyes meanwhile shadowed with contempt.

The vision dissolved, leaving the man alone under the stars, his mind in tumult. The first shock of introspection past, the blood surged again within him, slowly warming his soul into a semblance of a living thing. Then, soberly, deliberately, conscious that he was face to face with the crisis of life from which he had so long been fended, his mind forced upon him the high resolve to rise up out of the desuetude in which he had all his years found existence, and strive to make himself worthy.

After a time, from where he lay he saw the first streak of light pale the stars in the eastern sky, and spread slowly toward the zenith. The breathless hush of the dawn was on the world. The ice floes no longer ground and shifted. The breeze was still.

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The lake lay smooth and dark in the half-light.

Then, out of the stillness there came a sound that seemed to echo against the rock like a rifle shot, sharp and sudden. It was the clatter of a paddle on the gunwale of a canoe.

CHAPTER XXX

FOLLOWED

THE effect upon Hallam was like that of a man's name suddenly shouted at him in the streets of a strange city. He sat up, listening for a repetition, not knowing which way to turn. Then came the realization that it boded evil. Seizing his rifle he glanced sharply between the trees at the lake below. Nothing was to be seen and the silence was again absolute. Without disturbing Norma he ran up the slope of the rock and peered out toward the north. There was not much light and vision was uncertain. He listened but heard nothing. For an instant he fancied that he had been dreaming; then seemingly out of the lake itself there came a red flash, a report, and a sliver from the tree near which he stood whipped viciously across his sleeve.

His first feeling was one of intense surprise. He hardly understood. Some one had fired a gun. Then there leaped through

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his brain the realization that the shot had been fired at *him*. Another flash, and a bullet spattered rock-dust in his very face. With it, anger, rising in him like a flame, took the place of surprise and uncertainty. They were shooting at *him*.

He moved a step to the right, behind the rock that had spat at him. It reached breast high. With the movement he became conscious of the weight of the rifle in his right hand. With a suppressed ejaculation he grasped it as one grasps the hand of a long unmet friend. Instantly he became galvanized into action, and levering a cartridge into the chamber and leaning against the rock, he aimed at the dark spot, barely visible, as the source of the last flash. The roar of the heavy .45-90 finished the rending of the veil. Ransford Hallam at last was fighting.

He saw the splash as the bullet struck the water and there blazed an answering flash from the dark thing he now saw was a canoe. Whose canoe, he did not know, or care. The man in it had taken an unpardonable liberty with his person. It was exactly as if he had been slapped in the face by a stranger, wan-

Followed

tonly, without cause, upon the street. As he jacked out the empty shell and threw in another he felt a touch on his arm.

"They're after us. We've got to fight. Bring up the other rifle and the cartridge belts."

He flung the words rapidly over his shoulder, preoccupied, his eyes straining through the obstinate gloom. The girl's footsteps faded away and Hallam fired again. A ripping sound greeted the bullet and there was an exclamation like an oath.

"I got something that time," Hallam muttered through his teeth.

It was growing a little lighter, and following the shadowy form of the canoe he made out two figures, bow and stern, paddling away from him. One, the man in the bow, was bailing. He sent a shot after them futilely, for he could barely see his rifle-sights. He heard Norma behind him and turned.

"Keep down behind the rock. We must look like a pair of statues up here against the light."

Crack! came a shot from the retreating canoe. Hallam's rifle crashed in response.

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He could see his sights now, but the range was greater, and the bullet struck the water short of its mark, ricochetting far beyond in great leaps.

"Is it Stevenson?" asked Norma, standing up at his side. "He had no rifle."

Suddenly she pointed to the left where the packed ice from the western arm of the lake made a long streak of white to the island.

"Look!" she cried. "There is another canoe."

Hallam followed her outstretched arm and saw a second birch with two figures in it, that in the stern the bulkier.

"That's Stevenson," he growled. "I wonder if it's too far."

He took a rest on the rock and aimed carefully. A white splash to the right was the result of a nervous trigger-pull.

"No good," he muttered. "Mustn't waste cartridges. It looks like a siege. How are we off for provisions, Norma? Suppose you boil the kettle while we have time. I'll keep watch. If you hear a shot and I don't answer it you'd better come up and see why."

Followed

As she went he thought he saw a look of concern in her eyes, but she gave no sign beyond a nod, and he watched her move out of sight among the trees. When he turned again toward the lake he saw that the second canoe was putting out from the ice to join the first.

He began to figure up the situation. Whence came the other canoe? Stevenson and the young Indian had remained at the lake through the night, and the other Indians must have had instructions to follow from the post. It was a deliberate plan to capture them. Why? Hallam could find only one answer—Norma!

His eyes narrowed and his jaw grew hard.

"The drunken dog!" he muttered, and sent a useless shot at the two canoes, now half a mile away.

While he lay watching, Norma came bearing the breakfast she had hastily cooked. Hallam leaned his rifle against a tree and they ate, facing the lake to let no movement of the enemy escape them. The two canoes, after a short time, turned and headed in toward the shore and they saw the four

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occupants land on the point opposite the island, where they presently started a fire.

"It is easy to see, now, why Stevenson allowed himself to be disarmed," remarked Hallam as he swallowed the last of a dipper of hot tea. "He had this all arranged—those two post Indians."

"I might have planned it better," returned Norma.

Hallam shook his head.

"I don't see how."

"I might have hidden the liquor nearer the post and then brought Stevenson as far as this and sent him back, with directions how to find the cache. That would have given us more time."

"No," objected Hallam. "The post Indians would have been following just the same; and there is the ice. The only difference would have been that Stevenson would have had no 'Dutch courage' to urge him on."

The wind was rising with the sun and blew freshly from the west as on the day before. Norma rose and walked to that side of the island, looking at the ice-pack that now solidly blocked the thoroughfare—their only possible way of escape. The

mass had ceased to churn and grind, and lay immovable, glistening white in the sun.

"What chance, Norma?" asked Hallam as he stood at her side.

The girl shook her head.

"I have seen the same thing before in our own lake. This ice is shallow-water ice that was frozen to the bottom. You can tell by the gravel and rocks, still clinging to the pieces that have turned over. It is very heavy and solid and it will stay where it is until the wind changes and blows the pack free into the lake. The sun alone would loosen it in time, so that the jam in the thoroughfare would break up and run through."

"Then," said Hallam, "I don't see but we are marooned and besieged on this bit of rock somewhat indefinitely. I don't doubt that we can keep the enemy at his distance, but he may starve us out. Our provisions are none too plentiful."

"There are always fish," returned the girl.

"But nothing to catch them with."

"I brought a net from home," she said.

"Perhaps it would be well to set it now."

"A net?" questioned Hallam.

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"Certainly. It is the only way to fish if food is needed. We can set it out of sight of the mainland shore."

Hallam looked at the smoke of the fire on the point and hesitated. Stevenson and his Indians were hardly half a mile away and it would not do to risk a sudden surprise.

Norma saw the situation.

"Help me launch the canoe," she said. "I can do the rest."

They put the birch in the water and Hallam went back to his post. He saw Norma put out from shore, drop her net off the eastern part of the island and then return to watch. Presently a splash told them that the net was doing its work, and in less than an hour the girl brought ashore four large whitefish and one trout. The food problem seemed to be settled. The siege would not be ended by starvation.

On the mainland Hallam could see the men's figures moving about. They were pitching a tent. Presently all but one disappeared inside, evidently to make up the lost night's sleep.

The day wore dully on, Norma keeping a good deal to herself, visiting the lookout

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only occasionally. Hallam, sick at heart over her new attitude toward him, paced the top of the rock, silent, his mind puzzling at the problem of winning back the girl's lost confidence.

The afternoon shadows began to fall and Norma lighted her fire for the evening meal. When the fish were broiled over the hot coals she brought him his share and remained to eat hers. As the darkness fell the campfire on the point gleamed across the water and the shadowy figures, passing and repassing, were silhouetted sharply against the glow.

"I've been wondering," said Hallam, "whether they mean to settle down there or whether they are planning to attack us. The night would be their only time. We must keep a sharp lookout."

"You must let me take my turn, then," said the girl.

She insisted and Hallam finally agreed. He was to take the first watch until midnight and Norma was to call him again at dawn.

Weary from lack of sleep the night before, Hallam did not trust himself to the comfort of his bag, but, rifle in hand, slowly paced the

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summit of the island, his thoughts full of Norma, longing to tell her what lay in his heart, yet unable to open the door she had closed against him. Hour after hour he walked back and forth, watching the camp-fire on the shore flicker and die, only to burst into flame again, as the Indian on watch piled it with fresh logs.

But he had no thought of waking Norma. Midnight came and went. He could sleep in the daytime, when there was less danger of attack. As he leaned against a tree for a moment the butt of the rifle started a stone rolling down the slope, and as he turned to take up his sentry-like march again, he heard a light step and saw a shadowy figure between the trees.

"Norma?" he called, sharply.

"Yes. You have let me sleep too long. It must be well toward morning. That was wrong."

"I can sleep all day."

"That was not the agreement. Will you sleep now?"

He saw that he must, and cautioning her to watch the lake as well as the shore, he was about to go when she stopped him.

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"Ransford."

It was the first time she had spoken his name since they had left the post.

"Yes, Norma."

"Do you know why Stevenson and his Indians have followed us?"

Hallam hesitated.

"I do not think you do," said the girl, "so I will tell you and let you judge what it is best to do."

"What do you mean, Norma?" he asked, surprised, for only one reason had been in his mind. Could she have guessed it also?

"I mean that if I should tell the factor what he wants to know, he would turn back and let us go on our way. I cannot tell him truly, for I do not know, but I could tell him falsely, which might do as well—if only he believed I was speaking the truth."

"What could you tell, Norma? I don't understand."

"You have forgotten the gold reef that my father and McAvey found?"

He had nearly forgotten. They had not spoken of it for days.

"Does Stevenson know of that?"

"He knows that they found gold."

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"He has tried to make you tell?"

"Yes. Once, when you had gone down to the lake for water, he came to the cabin and tried to force me to tell him."

"Did he—did he—touch you?" Hallam asked, quickly "Why did you keep this from me?"

"If he had come again I should have told you," went on the girl, steadily, "but after the day you fought with him I saw that it would only make more trouble between you, so I kept silent."

"What did you say when he asked you?" inquired Hallam.

"I told him the truth, but he did not believe it. Now if I should tell him a made-up story giving a false location he might believe and go away."

Hallam stood a moment, thinking. Stevenson sober was the canny Scot. Money, gold, was uppermost in his desires. Stevenson with whiskey running down his throat was a different person. Gold would not satisfy him. He had shown that plainly, when he had tempted Hallam to take his liberty in exchange for Norma.

He saw that he must tell her.

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"Norma," he said, "you do not know why I struck Stevenson that day?"

"You told me it was something he said that no man could hear without anger," she replied.

"What he proposed was to let me go and keep you—for himself. If he can kill me that is what he will do now. The desire of men for gold is strong, but their passion for women is stronger."

For an instant the girl stood in silence. Then Hallam heard her take a breath sharply between her teeth, and though he could not see her for the tree-shadows, he almost felt the long shudder that shook her from head to foot. He knew that at last she understood.

"I am sorry that it was necessary to tell you this," Hallam went on, his voice low, "but if anything should happen to me it is better for you to know, for then you will know—what to do."

He waited a moment, then stepped close to her and touched her on the shoulder.

"Do you understand what I mean, Norma?"

"Yes," she answered. Then: "Please go and sleep. I—I want to think."

CHAPTER XXXI

AT HAND-GRIPS

IT was the hour before dawn, when the pulses of the world beat at their slowest. Hallam had hardly expected to sleep when he lay down in his bag, but the warmth, after the chill of the long night, overcame him, and in a few moments he had lost consciousness.

What awakened him he never knew, but suddenly he found himself starting bolt-upright, his confused, sleep-dulled senses futilely trying to grasp something that had occurred. His first thought was that Norma had called him. Then there flitted past his vision a shadowy figure that seemed to be born out of the tree trunks. With a shout he tried to reach his rifle, but before he could pull himself entirely out of the entangling bag he was borne back by the tiger-like rush of a human thing that leapt upon him and beat him down. At the same time he heard a shot and the cry of Norma's voice, and

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the next instant found him fighting like a wild animal.

Over and over Hallam rolled, with his assailant locked to him in a grip like steel. Down the slope of the rock, over sharp stones and jagged points of ledge, feeling nothing, knowing nothing except that he was fighting for his life, he strove for a vantage-hold. It was barely the gray of the morning, and though he could not see the man he grappled he knew him to be an Indian.

All the rugged strength that Hallam had stored up during his journeying now came into play. He felt the man's back muscles working as he sought to free himself from his crushing embrace, but Hallam's arms clung the tighter for his struggles. Each time he came uppermost he tried to beat the other's head against the ledge. They slipped and slid, snarling like two dogs in the street, almost to the water's edge. Hallam smelt the acrid, smoky odor from the dead ashes of the fire and knew that in another moment they would be in the lake. The Indian was striking him fiercely over the kidneys and he felt his strength going.

He wondered if it would be possible to

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drown his antagonist without dying in his death grip. Suddenly his hands touched something colder than the rock, and smoother. At first it felt like ice, then a movement brought his fingers against a sharp edge and he felt the skin break and the warm blood trickle out. It was the axe.

With a mental shout Hallam's cut hand clutched and caught the helve. He loosened his arms and with a wrench that called forth the strength of every muscle in his whole body, tore himself free. He sprang up. The Indian, with the litheness of a panther, his knife out, lunged savagely. Hallam stepped back, tripped, recovered himself like lightning, and swung his weapon as a riveter swings a sledge.

Through a blood-red mist Hallam saw the blade flash and felt the soft, crackling shock as it buried itself through hair and bone deep in the Indian's brain. As the man fell the helve twisted itself out of Hallam's hands, and when the body struck the rock it stood upright, quivering in the skull.

Hallam brushed the sweat from his eyes with his reddened hands and looked. There was no motion. The man was dead. A



THROUGH A BLOOD RED MIST HALLAM SAW THE BLADE FLASH

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sudden exultation seized him. The weariness that had wellnigh brought despair left his muscles and his whole body seemed to swell in bulk and grow with sheer power. He had killed a man in hand-to-hand battle. Alone, and taken by surprise, he had fought and conquered.

The red fog cleared and the thought of Norma flashed through his brain. Stepping forward he wrenched the axe from the dead man's skull and sprang up the rock.

Halfway he stopped and gave a shout. Then he began to laugh, immoderately, brutally. What he saw was the figure of Stevenson, his back against a tree, his arms waving uncertainly above his head, confronted by the girl with a rifle in her hands, steadily holding the muzzle to the factor's stomach.

She looked at Hallam in an agony of apprehension.

"Are you much hurt?" she asked, huskily.

"Not a bit," he answered. Then sensing something more than anxiety on his own account he asked shortly: "What is it?"

"Find your rifle. The others are coming."

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Hallam dropped his blood-stained axe and in a moment was back with his repeater.

"Don't let him move or make a sound. If he does, shoot," he warned the girl and dashed on to the lookout. Not a hundred yards away was a canoe among the drifting ice cakes with two Indians paddling hard for the island. Hallam flung himself down and fired. It was the point-blank range, but the shot missed and struck the water behind the canoe. Instantly he fired again and saw a great sliver of bark leap from the craft's side. The Indian in the bow gave a yell and fired at him, but the bullet sang wild through the trees overhead. Hallam shot again and the bow paddler sank back.

The canoe was filling and the Indian in the stern strove to turn the craft toward the line of firmly-packed ice that reached out from the point.

The birch, water-logged and unwieldly, was slow to respond. Hallam took quick aim, and with a cry the man went overboard, swimming for the ice. Hallam let him go. He saw him climb upon a large floe and drop behind a sheltering cake. The bowman, revived by the shock of the icy water, was

also making for the ice. When he reached it he crawled out and limped across to his companion. Neither had their rifles, and sending a wild shot in their direction as a warning, Hallam shouted a reassurance to Norma and hurried to where she still stood, holding the factor at bay.

"Now, you," Hallam said brusquely, "turn around and hug that tree-trunk as if it was your best friend. Norma, get something to tie him up with."

Stevenson began to plead for his life. He tried to deny that he had come to the island with evil intent, but Hallam disgustedly ordered him to be silent.

When Norma returned with several lengths of deerskin thongs he bound the factor's hands around the trunk and left him helpless. Then picking up the red-bladed axe he returned to Norma.

"Stay here for a while, or, better still, go to the top of the rock and watch the two Indians who are skulking on the ice-pack. There's something for me to do below that you won't care to see."

When she had gone Hallam launched the canoe, and weighting the dead Indian's

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body with stones, paddled out and sunk it in the lake.

The exaltation of battle was passing, but in its stead there came to him a new sense of manhood and of power. He felt a readiness to grapple with any situation that might arise, a consciousness that whatever the odds he was no longer a nonentity or a weakling, unworthy to be reckoned with. He seemed to have become suddenly more rugged, less refined. It was as if the veneer of civilization had been rubbed thin. From a man who had all his life avoided violence he had in a short quarter of an hour become one who accepted brute force as a part of life. He even smiled at the thought of himself as he had been, at the point of view that had caused him to try to bargain with a man like Stevenson. He had suddenly been thrust through a door into a new world. He felt no regret for having killed a human being. It did not even seem strange to him. It was necessary. It had to be done and he had done it. No man could have acted differently. It had been his life or his enemy's.

As he came ashore he heard Norma call, and climbed the rock to where she stood

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pointing to the west. The two Indians were making their way slowly, over the ice toward the land, the wounded man limping painfully, the other supporting him.

"They had better hurry," Norma exclaimed. "The wind is coming up from the south and the pack is loosening." Even as they stood watching, a large floe broke from near the island shore, leaving a lane of open water in its wake. But the two retreating Indians had seen their danger and were making their best speed. As they landed Hallam said:

"That settles the question of pursuit. We're free, Norma. As soon as this ice clears we'll bid good-bye to Factor Stevenson and his country—forever."

The girl looked at him steadily for a moment and then her gaze fell.

"I want to tell you, Ransford, how it happened."

"How what happened?"

"I fell asleep."

Hallam looked at her and then laughed lightly.

"Do you know what they do to soldiers who sleep at the post of duty?"

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"No."

"They shoot them the next morning at sunrise."

"I feel as if I deserved that," she said, a little puzzled at his mock severity.

"I will think it over," he said, his eyes smiling. "For the present I shall reserve sentence and let you off with getting breakfast."

He suddenly held out his hand, and his eyes grew tender.

"Come,—dear," he said.

For the first time she noticed the blood from his cut fingers.

"Are you hurt?" she exclaimed.

"Just a skin scratch. It's nothing at all. It saved my life though," he added. "If I hadn't stumbled on the axe that fellow would have got me. He had a knife."

The girl covered her face with her hands.

"I know," she said, "I saw it all, and I could do nothing. Your shout awakened me and I saw the two men. I fired at one, but the bullet must have struck his gun, for he dropped it. That was Stevenson. I didn't dare shoot at the other for you were together on the ground. So I stood and

threatened Stevenson so he could not help the Indian. I thought you would be killed, and through my fault. It was—horrible.”

He saw that she was trembling, now that the need for bravery was past, and that her eyes were full of tears. He stepped close and laid his arm about her shoulders. At the touch she straightened and drew back slightly. His arm fell away and he stood silent and disconcerted, for he knew the door that had closed between them was still locked.

As the morning wore on to noon, the wind freshened, warm from the south, and the ice continued to drift until the thoroughfare was almost clear.

They packed their belongings and Norma showed Hallam how to pitch a crack in the bottom of the canoe.

“What are you going to do with Stevenson?” was the girl’s question as they made ready to start.

“Why,” answered Hallam with a grin, “let’s go and talk to him.”

They climbed to where the factor sat sullenly on the ground, his hands bound tight with his arms around the tree trunk.

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"Well, Stevenson," began Hallam, "have you anything to say?"

"Nought but this," he growled. "If ye intend to mak' way wi' me, do it wi'oot the unnecessary preleeminaries, and get it ower. Ye ha' won the game. I'm beat, an' by a wumman. That is the thing that gi'es me shame."

Hallam laughed.

"I'm not going to kill you, Stevenson, though I've no doubt it would be justified. I'm going to leave you where you are. Your two other assassins got away, though one of them won't do much traveling, and they have no canoe. It may be a day or two, but they'll find you eventually. Good-bye."

"Meester Hallam," called the factor as they started toward the shore. "Wull ye no gie me a sup o' the jug I ha' so dearly bought, before ye go?"

Hallam for answer lifted it from Stevenson's canoe and bore it to the thirsting man.

"Say when," he said, and tipped it to his lips.

For a full minute, it seemed to him, the fiery liquor gurgled in the Scotchman's throat before he drew his mouth away.

"Ye've a heart, mon, ye've a heart. I'm

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grateful to ye' an' I'll warrant ye'll not be hearin' o' me again."

Hallam set the jug down behind him, for he had no wish to impose a torture, and in another moment the canoe was headed toward the thoroughfare.

They found the ice practically gone, and open water to the next lake.

"Norma," said Hallam, as they rested their paddles, "there is only one thing to do. As soon as the Indians from the post free Stevenson he will make for your home camp to look for more whiskey. He must not find us there. Our only way is to travel south to the great lake and make our way to railhead while we may. I trust no promises of his. We are free only if we can get out before he sets the Mounted Police on our trail. That dead Indian's relatives, too, are a danger. Do you see it as I do?"

"Yes," answered the girl.

"The gold we were to seek must wait."

"Yes," she said again.

"Will you trust me to take care of you, Norma?"

And for a third time, almost wearily, she answered "Yes."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CLOSED DOOR

IT was late when the last long wail of the locomotive announced the terminal, and the train from railhead roared into the station. The weary journey was over and Ransford Hallam stood upon his own ground once more, in the metropolis of the Canadian Northwest.

For more than four weeks they had traveled by canoe, by steamer, by scow and by wagon, up, seemingly forever up, the endless wilderness highway of the river, shunning the trading-posts on the lower reaches, bolder toward the last, until finally only that morning they had landed, weather-browned and ragged, at the railhead town.

To Norma that journey out of the North had been a succession of wonders. The river had been busy. Many boats freighting supplies to the posts had met them and passed downward on their way, bearing their chanting voyageurs. On one long portage

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there had been horses, that brought back sharply the almost forgotten days with her father on the ranch—the days before their exile in the Barren Grounds. The small steamboat that plied the long stretch of river below the Great Rapids had amazed her even as Fulton's first boat had amazed the people of the Hudson. The tinkling of a bell at an Anglican mission had delighted her with its strange music. The dresses, plain and unadorned, of the missionary's wife and daughter had drawn her interest and aroused misgivings that would not still, concerning her own masculine garb. Each hour in the latter days of the river climb had brought something new, a hint, a promise of what was still to come.

Hallam had watched her closely and had striven to prepare her for the marvels and the complexities that lay before. Part of his telling she grasped, and part of it she plainly failed to understand, for the image was not there. It was like describing music to the deaf, or the beauties of form and color to the blind.

But Hallam was troubled. At times, when something new was to be seen, the girl's

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interest quickened, and she questioned him, but in the intervals she relapsed into her strange reserve that baffled his every attempt to break it down. Cautiously, skilfully he had tried to look into her mind and read what lay hidden, but each attempt had failed. He had of late tried to put aside the thought that her attitude toward him had arisen from disappointment or from contempt. It seemed like something far deeper and more abstruse. Homesickness he had discarded as not in keeping with her sturdy independence. Physical illness, also, was denied by the abounding health that glowed in her cheeks and shone in the clearness of her brown eyes. Finally, the only explanation that became plausible was her feeling of ignorance, of unpreparedness, possibly of fear for the future and what it might hold for her, alone, uninitiated, without friends—without a woman friend.

With their landing at the railhead town Hallam found that the train left within the hour, which gave him just time to seek out Jackson, settle affairs with him, reclaim his effects and purchase from the storekeeper's stock a long mackintosh coat for Norma, to

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serve until he could procure for her a semblance of a wardrobe.

Cloaked in this she had made the journey to the city a hundred miles away. The closeness of the car, the heat and the motion had combined to torture her into acute discomfort, so that before they reached the end she had become ill to the point of collapse, lying in her seat white with nausea, caring hardly whether she lived or died. To Hallam it seemed brutal, and with pity in his eyes and love on his lips he sat by her, mothering her as he might, praying for the final wail of the whistle that would mean escape for them both.

He found a carriage and led her to it, pale and apathetic with suffering. As they lurched away from the station she lay back, half against the cushions, half against his shoulder, with eyes closed, as if conscious of nothing but the disturbing glare of the lighted streets and the confused roar of the passing traffic.

As they drew up at the hotel Hallam had named he suddenly found an unconsidered difficulty to solve, but with decision quickened by the thought of her suffering he hastened to the office and registered "Mr. and Mrs. Ransford Hallam, New York."

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As the last porter, with a generous fee jingling in his pocket, left their rooms, Hallam heaved a sigh of relief and turned to Norma, who, roused by the utter novelty of her surroundings, sat gazing about her in great wonder. Her color was coming back, and rising she threw off the long coat and moved about examining everything, touching this and that like a child in a strange house.

"Did I describe it well, Norma?" he asked. "Is it anything like what you expected?"

"It is beautiful, wonderful. It must be like a palace," she replied seriously.

He smiled.

"No, hardly that. Palaces are old, as a rule, while this is very, very new and a little raw, but very comfortable, which I am told palaces seldom are. We shall do very well here, I think."

He went to a connecting door.

"Will you come and see your room?"

Finding a switch button, he pressed it, suddenly flooding the place with light. It was tastefully furnished, and in one corner stood two beds, close together.

"You won't mind being alone for awhile? There are some things I must attend to.

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"You can sit by the window and watch the people."

He placed a chair for her, and raising the shade switched off the light. The life of the brilliantly lighted street below suddenly sprang into being like a moving picture on a screen, and the girl sank down with a little cry of wonder. Trolleys filled with people clanged past; cabs and automobiles rolled in endless procession; people on foot, hurrying or sauntering, women in light dresses, newsboys crying the latest sensation, all streamed by within the vision of the girl who had never seen a city. Absorbed, lost in the whirlwind of her own impressions, she sat, her face close against the pane, drinking in the sight with wide eyes.

Hallam stooped and raised the sash, and the sound of the street rose from a murmur to a roar.

"You'll stay here and watch for a little while?"

She nodded without turning her head, as if she were afraid of missing something of the marvel below, and quietly he left her there.

Tubbed, shaved, refreshed for the first time in weeks with clean linen, Hallam stood

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before his own mirror half an hour later, surveying with regret the wrinkles in an otherwise smartly fitting suit. As he started toward Norma's door he hesitated. To appear before her in this new guise seemed to him like breaking the only tie that bound him to her, for until now she had known him only in the rough, as her companion of forest and barren, lake and river—one clothed as were the few men she had seen or known. To find him changed in the twinkling of an eye to the type she was watching in the street might increase her sense of loneliness and isolation in this hurrying, clanging world that she so little understood. But at last he knocked.

"Norma?"

"Yes."

He opened the door and stepped quickly through, out of the path of light.

"It's interesting, isn't it?" he said, as he stood beside her in the dark.

"I never thought there were so many people in the world. It makes me afraid, somehow. And the women—their clothes! Oh, shall I ever wear things like that?"

"Yes, of course," he laughed. "I'm going now to get you some. If you don't like them

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you can get more tomorrow, but you must have something at once or you cannot go out. Are you hungry?"

She had completely recovered from the illness of the train, and nodded.

"Then I'll order something and be back by the time it gets here," he said. "I shan't be long. No one will disturb you. You won't be afraid?"

"I'll try. You—you are good to me, Ransford."

There was a queer little catch in her voice as she said it, and he bent over her there in the dark, until the fragrance of her hair was in his nostrils. He touched her hand, and for an instant he felt the fluttering of an answer. Then, as if she had forgotten herself, she quickly drew her hand away. It was the nearest approach to the old terms of intimacy and friendliness since the day she had disappeared from the cabin on the long lake, and Hallam thrilled with it. For a moment he stood uncertain, the one thing he longed to tell her trembling on his lips, but Norma leaned suddenly forward as if some new sight had caught her eye. The moment had slipped past.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DOOR OPENS

THE shops were still open, and after ordering dinner to be sent to his room Hallam recklessly plunged into the first that gave promise of yielding feminine mysteries. With the help of a good-humored saleswoman, whose sympathy his helplessness aroused, he succeeded in purchasing at least the essentials and fundamentals of a rudimentary wardrobe, and bore the package to the hotel. He found Norma as he had left her, sitting by the window, her chin in the palm of her hand, listening and gazing.

He drew the shade, and switching on the light pointed to the boxes he had brought.

"For me?" she asked.

"For you. All of them."

He slipped the paper from the topmost and drew forth a filmy negligé of pale pink with slippers to match.

"You ought to have some one to help you, Norma," he said, as he watched her wonder-

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ingly finger the delicate fabrics. "Tomorrow perhaps we can find a maid for you, but meanwhile here are some pictures that will show you how they go. Would you like to try by yourself?"

She nodded and he went out, softly closing the door behind him.

The dinner was brought and spread appetizingly on a table and Hallam sat down to wait. The minutes passed. He could hear Norma moving about in the other room, struggling, no doubt, with the mysteries of womankind. Half an hour went by. Hallam rose.

As he did so the door of Norma's room slowly opened and she stood upon the threshold. Hallam could hardly repress a start. With the exception of the two or three nights at her father's cabin, when she had worn a robe made of a rough gray blanket, he had never before seen her in any sort of feminine clothing. She had come out of the North garbed in a man's knickerbockers and a blue woolen shirt, in which he had left her half an hour ago. Yet, here stood a figure so feminine, so daintily arrayed that he stood speechless with amazement.

She had chosen the pink negligé, probably

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as being the least complicated of the apparel he had brought. It clung to her tall, young figure in sweeping, graceful lines, half-veiling, half-revealing the exquisite roundness of her limbs, the litheness of her waist, the charming slope of her white shoulders, from which sprang the firm column of her throat. Her hair, always heretofore braided in great plaits that swung half-way to her knees, she had tried to pile high upon her head, and lack of skill had accomplished a purely accidental result that was, strangely enough, effective. The brown masses that shone always with health and scrupulous care now showed rich and lustrous in their coiled profusion.

"Norma!" burst from Hallam's lips as, hesitant at first, she now stepped through the doorway. "You are wonderful! How in the world did you ever accomplish it?"

"What?"

She stopped half-way across the room and looked at him, raising one hand to her hair with a gesture that was perfect in its feminine grace.

"You might have just come from the hands of a skilful maid in any Paris boudoir. Is it really true that you are you?"

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She did not laugh. Rather, his praise seemed to make her uncomfortable, for her brows knitted in the old frown. A little piqued, he swept his hand toward the waiting table.

"Come," he said, "the things are getting cold. Your ladyship must dine."

Throughout the meal he tried his best to be gay, to chatter nonsense, to interest her in the new dishes, and to hold out alluring promises for the morrow. But it was in vain. The girl seemed not to understand or not to care. She ate but little, and the replies she made were monosyllabic and perfunctory. Her gaze wandered about the room, but Hallam noticed that she looked most in the direction of his bureau. He tried in vain to discover the cause of her interest until he remembered that he had placed upon it a photograph in a silver frame. It was a photograph of Sophia Burton.

When they had finished and Hallam was lighting a cigarette, Norma rose and without a word walked across the room and took the picture in her hand.

Hallam, all through dinner had been possessed of the feeling that something was very

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wrong. His attempts at conversation seemed constantly to strike a false note, but try as he would he could not fathom it. It was as if some great barrier, the barrier of which he had so long been conscious, had grown suddenly more stubborn and impenetrable. He dropped his cigarette into his coffee cup and walked to the bureau.

"Who is this?" Norma asked, the picture still in her hand.

"Her name is Sophia Burton," Hallam answered. "She lives in New York."

"It is she who wished for the musk-ox skins," Norma said, as if she were speaking to herself.

"Yes," replied Hallam. "Norma, can you never forgive that?"

Without answering the girl crossed to the window and stood for a moment looking down into the street, still gay with lights and people. Then abruptly she turned and walked swiftly to her own room. Before he could speak, she had closed the door.

Hallam paced the floor. The minutes passed and the door was still closed. Finally, with a nameless fear possessing him, he stepped quickly across the room and without

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knocking flung it open. At first he did not see her. Then his eye caught a crumpled heap of pink on the floor by the white twin beds.

In an instant he was by her side, his arm about her shoulders.

"Norma, Norma—are you never going to tell me what troubles you so? Are you always going to hold me away from you? You can't do that. I found you. I want you. You belong to me. I love you."

His words fell hot and thick from his lips, and rising to his feet he drew her to him, holding her close and looking down into her eyes.

"What is it, Norma?" he cried. "Where is the trust that lay between us in those wonderful days of snow and cold? Does that mean nothing to you now? Does it mean nothing that the heart you can feel beating against yours is a man's heart, and that it beats for you, alone, of all the women in the world? Tell me, dear, does your own heart give no answer?"

She made no effort to draw back, but he could feel the tenseness of her body against his own. Slowly she raised her head and

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looked at him. He waited, watching and wondering, and slowly there came a change. It was like the melting of the snows of her own icy land and the coming of the spring. Her eyes lost their doubt, and into their clear, brown depths came a look of great wonderment, of longing, and at last, of peace. With a little cry she flung back her head. He felt her rigid muscles relax, and her arms creep up about his neck, and then, with a little sigh that was half a sob her face lay buried on his breast.

"Sweetheart," he whispered, "have the troubles gone?"

The dark head nodded.

A great light suddenly illuminated his mind.

"You thought it was the woman who wanted the skins?"

Her head pressed more closely against his heart.

"My dear, my dear," he whispered, his lips deep in the softness of her hair.

After a long time she lifted her head a little.

"Ransford."

"Yes, dear."

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"Do you think I can ever learn?"

"Learn what, sweetheart?"

"Learn to be like other people. I am very ignorant. I shall make you ashamed. Are you sure that it is not all a mistake—my coming into the world like this, and that you won't grow very tired of teaching me? Why do you love me, Ransford?"

"Because you are the most splendid woman in the world, Norma,—because you have shown me the way from puppyhood to manhood. Whatever I am now, whatever I may become, I shall owe to you."

He suddenly placed his hands on her shoulders and held her at arm's length, pride, admiration, adoration glowing in his face.

"Listen, Norma," he said. "I went into the North at the behest of a woman, the woman whose picture you saw. She had called me a quitter, and I knew that she spoke the truth. I got what I went for, but I did not do it alone. I was still a quitter. If it had lain with me I should not have brought back the prize. It was you who awakened the *man*, Norma. It was your courage, your willingness, even at the risk of your life, to set me right with another woman

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that roused what manhood there is in me. It was you who set the pace. It was for you that I killed a man. I would do it again—for you.”

Norma was silent for a time. Then she said:

“I am sorry for that other woman. She does not know what she has lost.”

* * * * *

Hallam looked up from his packing to find his wife gazing at the picture of Sophia Burton that still stood on the bureau. She was twisting a plain band of gold that ringed her finger, and smiling.

“Do you know, Ransford,” she said, as he came and slipped a strong arm comfortably about her shoulders, “do you know, cruel people may be of some use in the world after all.”

As if he had suddenly thought of something Hallam fumbled in his trunk and drew out a little packet of velvet skins. He held them out to her.

“What shall we do with these, Norma?”

“We will carry them to her—as a punishment,” she said, still smiling.

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As Hallam tossed the furs back he noticed his great coat on a nearby chair, and as he picked it up to fold it something dropped, apparently from under one of the pocket-flaps. Norma stooped and caught it.

"Ransford."

He turned to find her staring at a sheet of crumpled paper.

"Look!"

He took the paper. On it was drawn a rough map showing lakes and streams. One point was marked with a cross.

"Where did you get this?" asked Norma, excitedly.

"I never saw it before."

"Think!—McAvey—"

"You mean—it is the location of the gold reef?"

"Yes."

Hallam thought hard. At last he gave a shout.

"I know. I slept in that coat on the bed where McAvey had lain dead. The paper must have been there, and caught the edge of my pocket. I've married an heiress, you see. When shall we start to find our mine?"

Norma twisted the soiled sheet in her

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fingers and let it drop to the floor. Hallam noticed and came close.

“Promise me that you will never go,” she whispered. “I will try to be more than gold to you, my husband.”

THE END.

